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THROUGH·WINTRY·TERRORS

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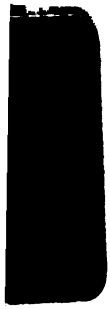

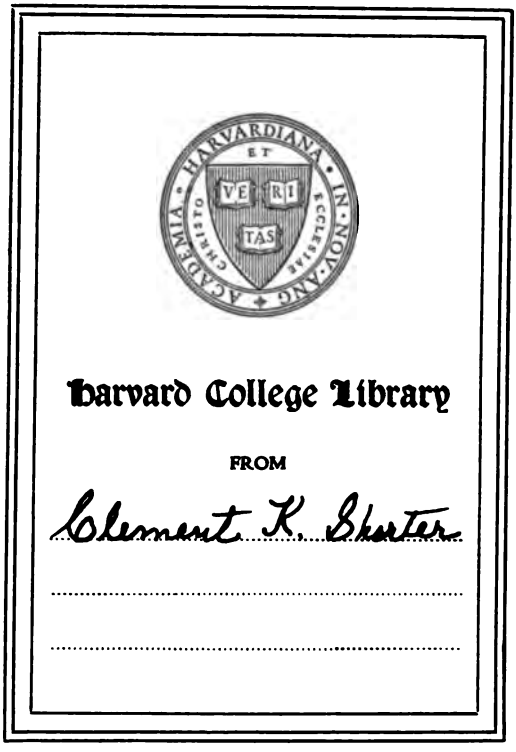

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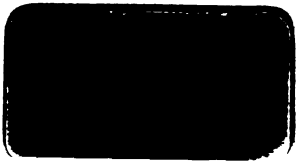

THROUGH WINTRY TERRORS

"'MR. WENDOVER . . . DARED TO MAKE LOVE TO ME!'"
(*p. 165.*)

THROUGH WINTRY TERRORS

BY

DORA SIGERSON SHORTER

Author of "The Father Confessor," "The Country House Party," and "Collected Poems"

"I too have come through wintry terrors—yea,
Through tempest and through cataclysm of soul"
WILLIAM WATSON

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Clement K. Shorter
Knockmoroon,
Great Missenden, England.

THROUGH WINTRY TERRORS

CHAPTER I.

Whatever may befall thee, it was preordained.—MARCUS AURELIUS.

THERE was a disturbance at No. 7, Sherrard Street, and the neighbouring houses showed signs of listeners. Several windows were half raised, and the cautious lifting of curtains told that in spite of the silence that held the street, walls had ears and eyes.

Opposite the lodging-house there was none of that genteel seclusion that marked the listeners in the row where No. 7 stood. No. 7 had always been the black sheep since the Moores took it, Mrs. Moore being reported ill-bred—she bought her vegetables at the door—the girls flighty and fast. Mr. Moore, too, could be heard when all his respectable neighbours were in bed, cursing with an unlimited vocabulary the latch-key and the keyhole. Often through

the thin walls of the house the neighbours could catch the sound of loud voices and bangings of doors, along with other noises indicating that therein dwelt violent temper and vulgarity in showing it.

But, to-night, the row was not behind the door, but in the street, and from the lodging-house opposite the best view was to be had. The spinster who had taken the first floor front was seated by the window in her dressing-gown, evidently enjoying the scene. The two apprentices who lodged on the top storey were giggling to themselves. The young artist on the second floor was leaning out of the window so far and so eagerly that the spinster at the window below seemed in danger of receiving him upon her head at any moment. If there were no other watchers from the house, it was because the servants, or rather servant, slept at the back, and nothing less than the last trumpet or the voice of the maiden landlady who was away for the night at her sister's, would have wakened the wearied creature before her usual hour of rising in the morning.

The windows of No. 7 were also filled with angry or distressed faces. From the top storey a girl's head white with curl papers leaned forth, the face full of wonder and curiosity, a servant evidently; from the second, two dark pretty women, their cheeks white and eyes staring. They were talking in low tones; it sounded as if they were praying to anyone who caught the low murmur of their almost inaudible voices. Upon the first floor window, and again on the doorstep, the eyes of all the wakening street were fixed, for from the casement leaned an enraged and injured father, and up on the doorstep, before the street door, stood a repentant and terrified daughter. From the window came down a torrent of abuse and reproaches, from the doorstep floated up a vapour of tears and excuses. Behind the father at the first floor window stood the wife, wringing her hands, afraid to speak.

"Twelve o'clock at night!" the man was shouting so that all the neighbours could hear him. "You dare to come back to this respectable house—you and your bicycle and your young man—your young

man, I say—where is he gone? Why has he sneaked off before I punched his d—— head?" Here he became incoherent, and the girl's voice rose, shrill and tremulous.

"I could not help it, father. Indeed, indeed, my bicycle broke down. I had to walk home. Oh, father, indeed, indeed I could not help it."

"And you couldn't stop at an hotel and telegraph to me?" he sneered, recovering his voice and trying to keep it steady. He was very drunk.

"I thought it best to come straight home. I had no money. I don't think there is an hotel there. Would it have been better? I did not know what to do."

"Your sisters are in bed asleep," the man yelled, and two dark heads drew in from the window above. The young apprentices in the lodging-house laughed.

"You could not come home with them in the train. You must stay behind to disgrace your father and bring his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

"Only Dolly went, and you know we

have but one bicycle, so she rode there, and I was to have ridden back, and I should have been here long ago only it broke down."

"And you came alone, of course, you hussy!"

"Oh no, father," she whispered innocently in return; "Joe Smiley was with me. We met him, and he said the road was not safe for a girl to ride by herself, so he saw me as far as the door."

"Saw you home, did he? The scoundrel! You were safe in the dark with Joe Smiley! Where is the blackguard?"

He pounded the window-sill till his hand hurt, and feeling the pain through his sodden brain he associated it with Joe Smiley, and fell to a string of abuse. So piercing and so eloquent was he that the young apprentices nearly toppled over with their suppressed mirth; but the art student, like an echo, repeated the man's words, "The blackguard!" glaring with furious eyes at the drunkard opposite. The old man, hearing the voice, stared round in drunken triumph, discovering that he

had an audience; and the girl, realising also that many eyes were upon her, beat the door, crying piteously:

"Let me in, father, let me in!"

From inside the house came a cry as pitiful in answer:

"Let the child in for God's sake, let the child in!"

But the man, swaying at the window, in a loud voice drove her from the door.

"Begone, you bad girl! You have disgraced your home! Don't dare to knock at my door again, or I shall have you turned away by the police."

He shut the window with so fierce a hand that one of the panes cracked across. And through the walls the neighbours could hear the voice of a sobbing woman appealing:

"Let the child in! For God's sake, let the child in!"

The girl crouched upon the doorstep for a moment, not knowing where to turn. Then a soft clink startled her—something white fluttered from the third-storey window, and fell into the area, lost. It was

the servant's little earnings that her moneyless sisters had begged and dropped—a bad shot out of her reach. She looked up and saw the pitying, helpless women above, and at the other faces, which did not seem pitiful, watching her from the surrounding houses. Then, with a low cry of shame, she turned and went quickly away into the darkness.

CHAPTER II.

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope.—JOHNSON.

DANIEL MACDERMOT ran up the stairs to his rooms, taking two steps at a time. Opening the door of his chamber, he flung his overcoat upon a chair and threw his hat upon the top of it. The glow of a dim fire rested on him as he moved about the room, outlining his tall, rather stooped young figure, his straight black hair, and for the moment dancing eyes. He looked a man of thought rather than of action, and to-night evidently the thinking was good. He had won a sum of £100 from an art magazine: £50 for the best figure drawing, and £50 for the best landscape drawn by competitors under twenty-one. He felt a millionaire. What would he do with it—this huge fortune? That he knew well. There were not a hundred different ways to spend

it with him—only the one: to help him to succeed in the future he loved and had planned out since the time he could know there was a future to plan. He wanted to succeed in the only way he thought he had any talent for—Art. He set a little kettle upon the hob, and sat down waiting for it to boil.

All the long days of the past came crowding round him. What a crown it had to-night—that dreary, struggling, famished past. To-night was the recompense for it all. He saw the little boy beaten for sketching instead of working at school; he recalled, too, the reproaches of the old aunt who helped him with her money, but not her sympathy. Indeed, she had so little of that that she wasted it on nobody but herself. His mother, with his coming, had slipped away, leaving the wailing infant to fill the place she had left vacant in the world.

His father, a dreamer, whom this world had little patience with or mercy upon, starved on his verses; and died of "acute pneumonia," said the dispensary doctor, when he might have said, "sensitiveness,

helplessness, hunger!" But a busy doctor amongst his throng of grumblers to single out a man and hold him were impossible. "Go. I don't want to feel your pulse or see your tongue. Look me in the eyes till I read your soul, man; hunger is killing you—hunger for love, hunger for hope, hunger for sympathy—that's what is killing you, sir!" Ah! well, poor patient, what if he had read that in your soul and ordered you love, sympathy, hope, instead of port wine, beef tea, and sweetbread, they would have been equally impossible to command.

So Daniel Macdermot, after much useless stringing of rhymes and tearing of heart-strings, took his leave of an ungrateful world without tears. He and his prolific muse made their flight together perhaps to a kinder sphere. In this at least they were forgotten, and by none missed save by the little child named Daniel Macdermot, who cried more than most little ones, perhaps missing what he could not know he had not—a mother's love and a father's care. Or, perhaps, it was because he hung so long beneath a heart that wept much

over him and the coming into so cold a world for a little babe. Full of that poor mother's tears he was born, and wept them over his little self afresh.

"Surely the child has everything it wants," said his Aunt Maria. "It's mere bad temper that makes him continue to cry when I forbid it." She would draw her hand away from the sticky fingers that tried to grasp it, and set the baby down as it climbed into her lap. "I'm sure I have been more than a mother to you," she said, "but you must learn to amuse yourself. I am too busy a woman to waste my time on play." And so the baby sat alone and wept, since she, poor lady, had her busy hours filled up with attendance on six prize cats and two parrots.

"It's a funny thing to leave to you, Maria," the dying Daniel Macdermot had said, with his rare smile, "this little ball of life, with feet unable to walk, hands unable to hold, eyes almost unable to see, and yet the one only of all my productions that will live after me and make some few in the world remember my name."

Maria had not replied, thinking the remark improper and unfitted for a dying man. Full of rebellion against the burden that had been thrust upon her, she took it up with a strong sense of duty, but without love, and did what she considered her best for it till it was able to do for itself.

Daniel remembered to-night that long apprenticeship to a hated business, then his position as clerk, and how he had worked after hours at his beloved pursuit, taking lessons in the evening and carrying sketch-books in his pocket wherever he went so as to snatch at every moment he had outside his business, sketching as he travelled to and fro on tramcars and even over his lunch and dinner. He remembered how pleased his old aunt was when he had got his clerkship, and she had no longer to share her small income with him. But to-day for the first time she had made him a generous offer. She had said she would help him in whatever effort he was about to make, so that he would not have to draw at once upon his hundred pounds. She was glad Art had something solid in it after all, and,

since he was determined and steady, she would do her best for him.

In truth, his winning of a prize had done much to raise him in her eyes. She was one whose affections were taken by the applause the world gave those belonging to it. As she could not win notoriety for herself, she would willingly shine in reflected glory. The more the glory, the more her heart melted to the object of it. What if Daniel had really talent, what if he became famous. He bore her name. He was a grateful fellow, and would always be a little under her thumb, and he would one day be her heir. He was her only surviving relation. So she delighted Daniel by proposing to take a small studio for him, where he could start at once upon the painting of portraits. She had even written to a rich friend of hers, a Society beauty, asking if she would help the young artist by giving him a few sittings. "If he makes a success of you," she wrote, "his future is assured."

Daniel clasped his hands behind his dark head, and with his mind's eye he saw the picture that was to make him famous. He

had no fear to attack so great a subject as this much-talked-of lady; he was confident he only wanted a chance to become great. He saw the glowing picture that filled his room with an almost holy radiance, the slight woman's figure that bent towards him from the dark background, the shining face with lips half parted to speak. He started to his feet. Ah! it had disappeared. Oh! to begin at once. To make permanent those lovely features, to save them from decay and death, to cause them to live for ever with his name beneath them.

He did not seem alone as he sat to drink the tea he hastily made himself. A beautiful woman seemed by him in the shade.

"But I shall lead you forth," he said, "and you shall stand for ever on the edge of the shadow, looking out at the world that will always be at your feet." He heard the clock strike eleven, and wondered why he had taken tea so late. "I shall not sleep now for hours, so may as well get my books." He settled down to read, and it did not seem to him more than a few minutes before he became dimly aware that some-

thing was preventing him from studying. He lifted his head and listened. It was only a row in the street—some drunken creature in the grip of a policeman. He turned over a page and heard the sound of feet running across the room overhead, the creak of a window being opened. "Those fellows," he thought, with a smile, "always love a row, whether it is their own or somebody else's."

But there was something in the sounds that came to him from the street that made him close his book and go to the window. Drawing it up, he leaned out; he could see by the dim light of the street lamp the young girl weeping, and the irate father in the window above.

Which of the three girls was this, he wondered. Two were at the upper windows, but he could not see their faces clearly. He remembered often seeing them going in and out of No. 7. He had admired them as a fresh, sweet sight to rest his weary eyes upon when he lifted his gaze from his books. Now, they were all in trouble: the two heads above and the little figure below seemed to call upon his chivalry for help,

and what could he do but pity, and rage and rage again—all the more because he knew none of them and was half in love with all! Now he heard with anger in his heart the reproaches heaped upon the poor girl. The pretty innocent child to be charged in that way before the whole street!

He leaned farther out, and the old man's voice leaped across the road. "Safe in the dark with Joe Smiley, the blackguard!" And the student, gazing at the old man with furious eyes, cried like an echo, "The blackguard!" He heard the further charges of the drunken father, the cry of the child, "Let me in! Let me in!" Then he saw her crouch closer in the shadow after her vain appeal, her startled look at the open windows of the neighbouring houses, her cry of shame as she sped down the street into the darkness.

CHAPTER III.

And when a lady's in the case,
You know all other things give place.

GAY.

WITHOUT a moment's hesitation Daniel ran down the stairs and out into the street after the girl. What he was going to do he had no idea at the moment; all he realised was that danger and trouble followed close on the flying feet of the young creature who sped on alone before him. He found her standing at the corner of the road hesitating which way to go. He could hear her crying softly as he came near her, but she did not know he was there till he put his hand upon her arm. Then she gave a low cry and turned to run, all trembling. He followed, apologising:

"It's only me, Daniel Macdermot. Don't be afraid. It's only me."

His incoherent and stammering voice

only made the girl hasten quicker, uttering under her breath signs of her fear.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Seeing no way of bringing her to reason, he seized her in spite of her struggles by both her hands and forced her to look at him. He kept saying, "Look at me, look at me, look at me," feeling if she would but raise her eyes to his she could not mistake his intentions till her terrified senses began to come back to her. Then she looked at the young fellow who held her in so forcible a grip, and seeing his eyes, knew him to be honest.

"You are a gentleman," she said, speaking her thoughts aloud, and it struck her this was indeed a time that she had used the much-abused word in its right sense. Standing quiet, she stopped crying, saying, "What do you want with me?"

"I want you to go back home," he answered eagerly. "They will let you in. Some of your people will be watching."

"They dare not, they dare not," she replied. "When he is like that no one

dare cross him. Oh, what shall I do? Where shall I go?"

"Come back with me. I will knock and speak to your father."

"He would kill you," she moaned. "When he is like that we are afraid, and to-night he is worse than usual. He has been losing money, too, and is mad with the loss of it and with wine. Mother"—she wept afresh—"will fight for me and suffer—suffer."

"You have friends who will take you in?"

"No; any we know live far away from here, out of town, and it is late. What can I do?"

"There is only one thing to do: come back with me. There is a lodger, a Miss Simpkins, will take you into her room, and to-morrow you can go home."

The girl smiled through her tears. "You are very kind to me," she said, turning and walking by his side.

When the two reached the door of the lodging-house all the street seemed quiet and asleep except in No. 7, where a light still burned. The girl searched the house

with eager eyes for a sign that she was forgiven, but there was no such sign, only a soft murmur crept through the walls that sounded like the sobbing of a woman. With a gasping cry of "Mother!" she turned away and followed Daniel through the passage. She went after him up the dim stairs, trying to see her way by the glimmer of the matches he struck, and at last stood beside him outside Miss Simpkins's room. He knocked softly and got no answer; but seeing the light shining from a chink beneath the door, did not despair of being heard. He knocked louder, and Miss Simpkins stood grim and forbidding before him, clad in a loose and unbecoming morning gown of the muddy fawn that muddy-complexioned, fawn-haired people love to wear. The girl trembled when she saw her; but Daniel, man-like, did not notice the feminine claws drawn out and then sheathed, which the girl at once shrank from.

"Oh, Miss Simpkins, here is a young lady in distress," he said cheerfully in his innocence. "I want you to take her in for the night."

"I could not think of such a thing," she said stiffly. "I don't even know the—the —lady."

"Oh, but you saw it all out of the window," he answered, rather impatiently. This was not the way he thought to have been met. "You would not have the heart to refuse. What is the poor child to do if you won't help her?"

"Poor child!" The words proved disastrous. Miss Simpkins, who clung to youth by all the arts that man invented when Nature would do no more, resented the caressing word furiously as applied to another woman. The words, too, reminded her of a forgotten voice that spoke them to her as tenderly, calling her "poor child" in years gone by. For the first time she was driven by the echo to remember how many, and to know she was old beneath the paint and powder. She was old, old, old. She stood opposite the young girl, and for her fresh young beauty and the fewness of her years, she stepped back and shut the door upon her.

Daniel turned with a black frown upon

his face, and bidding the girl follow him, went before her to his own rooms and turned up the lamp.

"How beastly women are to one another," he said, stamping on the floor to relieve his feelings. "Jealous, I suppose," he continued, hitting the nail, "not shocked, as she would wish one to believe."

"Why should she be shocked?" the girl asked. "I have done no harm. She was very unkind. I am glad she did not take me in," and as she spoke a tear ran down her white cheek.

"I dislike old maids," the youth went on quickly, talking to cover the discomfort of the girl. "They are so bitter. They profess to hate men, because they are husbandless. They hate wives because they themselves are childless. They hate the young because their own youth has left them, and they hate the old because age approaches them. "I think all old maids ought to be" —then he smiled—"married!"

He looked at the weary face of his guest, and felt he was powerless to cheer her. "I wish you would rest," he said pitifully.

"The good to-morrow will make everything right. Look! What an hour! You will try and make yourself at home here. I shall find another room."

"You are sure I am not putting you to a lot of trouble?" The girl raised her head anxiously. "I am afraid you will not be comfortable, driven out like this."

"I shall be all right," he said, and she smiled gratefully as they clasped hands, thinking, poor things, that the world had done well for them, after all. That their innocent heads had thought out and settled every difficulty.

When the door closed after the young fellow, the girl seated herself at the window and gazed across the road with drooping, weary eyelids, till the dawn came, and in the grey light the door of the house opposite opened and a wan-faced woman looked wildly up and down the street. Then the girl stole away from her post, past the inhospitable room where Miss Simpkins turned upon her bed, past other doors, wondering as she went behind which slept the good young fellow who had been a friend indeed,

and, running across the road, was folded in her mother's arms.

But her young chevalier, having nowhere to lay himself down, walked the streets all night, congratulating himself on doing the right thing. "I have saved her from scandal," he thought in his wisdom.

CHAPTER IV.

Joy comes, grief goes, we know not how.—J. R. LOWELL.

WITH the morning came delight. Daniel received a letter from his aunt. The great lady had agreed to sit. He was to come at once. That day, at the very hour when he got the letter, he was to bring his easel, paints, and all his dear belongings with him in a cab to No. 12, Paradise Place. What a name! The studio was his, the commission was his, fame was his, he lived at last! Before he reached his door his imagination had the picture finished, hung on the line at the Academy. He had become an R.A. by the time he had clattered downstairs, dragging his easel bumping after him on the uncarpeted stairs. He dropped his paints, dropped his brushes. In stooping to pick them up, he swore at them, laughed at them, behaved in such a manner that the black

house cat which had always been his friend arched her back and spat at him—oh, omen of ill luck—as he went from the house.

Miss Simpkins, hearing his laughter, shut her thin lips like a trap on the word that leaped out as a mouse—"Hussy," for she thought he was thinking of the girl he had befriended; but he had quite forgotten there was such a one in the world.

He reached the studio, all aglow, set up his easel, and got everything ready, full of fury to begin. Then he paced the room, looking at the clock.

"She must be here in a few minutes," he said. "I hope she won't be late, the days are not so very long." He looked out of the window. "That must be her cab. No; of course, she has a carriage."

A carriage opposite his door. How proud he felt! He dreamt of future duchesses coming behind prancing steeds to have their portraits painted by him, and—but why did this lady not come? She said eleven o'clock; it was now just going to strike twelve. One can never depend upon women to be in time. They would feel humili-

ated, surely, if they kept an appointment to the minute with a mere man. A man should be on the spot first, of course. He knew that, but to wait an hour, an hour, and the beautiful canvas stretched before him waiting, too. He took his palette in his hand, trying his brushes on it. Perhaps she was not coming at all. Women often change their minds at the last moment. Oh, heavens, was that a telegram to say so? No; only the post. What a relief! Nothing to say she was not coming. He squeezed out some of his colours and became furious.

"Why don't you come?" he shouted, addressing the door. "You are a foolish creature—not even pretty, I'll be bound. If you don't hurry I shall not paint you at all. Don't you know I am waiting?"

He stopped suddenly—all red. There was a knock at the door. He opened it. She swept in. Poor miserable, where was he now? A schoolboy going to paint a lily, almost senseless with her perfume, blind with her beauty. "Won't you sit down?" he said lamely.

"Miss Finola Beaumont has kindly consented to sit for an hour," he heard a thin voice say. That his aunt was there he had not noticed.

"She is very kind," he said humbly. "Please throw your cloak off. There! that could not be better! You are perfect now!" He blushed.

"Shall I take off my hat?" She raised her arms.

"Please," he said, wishing to see more of her beauty, though he thought she could not look better than she did in the bit of velvet and roses she had laid aside. He gazed on the new-discovered gold. "You are perfect," he said, and was again confused. "I mean, the position could not be better." He took up his charcoal and attempted an outline. Then, forgetting everything but his dream, he put down the pencil and gazed upon her. "I have never seen a beautiful woman before," he said aloud, and then realised she was a living creature, not one of his dream-maidens. "I beg your pardon," he murmured.

His aunt turned upon him from her

corner. "Miss Beaumont gets plenty of compliments," she said sharply; "she wants work from you."

He took up his pencil again and worked in silence; his lips closed for fear he might answer. But the beauty, almost weary of praise, smiled, knowing it had burst from him in spite of himself. He, seeing her, snatched his brushes to put that smile upon canvas. The thought came to him that unborn men would envy him as he lay in his grave, when they looked and were snared by that painted smile. They would remember that he had seen it before him on the living face. And again another thought upon the heels of that. How all the warm loveliness he gazed upon must fade and be put away in the ground. Quick then, poor imperfect art, to the rescue. Fix for ever with your mockery of nature the lovely form, the tangle of gold, snow and crimson, that men may look and wonder, as one looks into a pool, where lies reflected the sun shining up, a shadow without warmth, light, or life.

"Do you paint without making a

drawing?" The soft tones came waking him from his thoughts.

"Yes, I cannot wait," he said, looking at her with a sigh. His heart was failing at every touch of his brush. How could he ever do justice to that glow of colour? "I just make a few important points, then trust to my brush for the rest."

"You have only half an hour more," his aunt interrupted; "don't waste your time talking."

"You will give me a little longer?" he said, appealing to Miss Beaumont. "Just a little longer for the first sitting?"

But he was told it was impossible. Beauties have so many engagements. So he worked without speaking for the little time left him, a deep frown between his brows.

He left the studio late that day, full of strange emotions. Now his heart beat with joy, now throbbed with pain; great hopes shone around him, to be hidden next moment by clouds of despair. When he took his last look at the sketch he did not care to live another day, it looked so poor. When he got to the door he cheered up; it

was really not bad now that he thought of it a little less critically. He ran back and uncovered it. Yes, it was really good; and when he reached the street with the memory of it he fell into deep despair again, and had to go back a second time to gaze upon it. Thus backwards and forwards he went, unable to tear himself away, only by force of will keeping his hands off his brushes, knowing that he would ruin what he had done if he attempted to correct its many errors without the model.

Dusk at last drove him forth, and all the way home to his lodgings he kept wishing the days would pass, till it was the hour for his lovely model to sit to him again. It was the great day of his life, he thought, swinging along the streets at a quick pace, seeing nobody. He had cast off the old life and started the new. However hard he had to work now, it was for a mistress he loved. He would slave day and night for Art without a murmur.

For the first time in his life he seemed to realise the power of beauty, and it intoxicated him. The lovely model he had

seen to her carriage started thoughts he had never cared to dream before. The perfume from her hair, the rustle of her silks, the softness of her rich furs, appealed to him. He wanted to raise himself from his middle-class life and walk in her world as an inhabitant. It was his world, too—he was sure of it; for his eyes loved rich colours and sought even among flowers the heavy gold and crimson more than the passionless blues and whites. His ear listened with more pleasure to the song of the thrush near the castle than the faint sweet trill of the lark hanging midway to heaven. If he ever painted, he told himself, it would be pictures of glowing colours, halls of lovely women, massed with flowers, some face to shine beautiful beyond the others against a gold and crimson background. Never would he choose the quiet village maidens, sewing under the trees—a study of light and shade more than a picture to love. Not for him any such models or subjects as the present-day artist seemed to delight in.

When he reached his home it seemed ages

since he had left it that morning, and for the first time he remembered the girl he had befriended, and wondered how she fared. Passing Miss Simpkins's door, it seemed to him as if it were not closed, and a shadow looked through the chink at him as he went by. He smiled, wondering at her curiosity, and opened his own door. Mr. Moore stood before him as if going to strike him to the ground. He half started back, then heard the stairs behind him creak. He knew Miss Simpkins was tracking him, evidently hoping to hear a quarrel. He shut the door and went into the room.

"Do you want me, sir?" he said shyly in a low voice.

The older man seemed almost speechless with rage. "I have wanted you for the last twelve hours," he stammered. "You dare to wonder why I am here!"

"I certainly wonder what you want?" the youth replied hotly.

"I want to know what you purpose to do about my daughter!" he thundered.

The youth stared aghast.

"About your daughter?"

"You took her into your rooms last night. Don't dare to deny it." He glanced at the young man with bloodshot eyes.

"You turned her into the streets," Daniel answered fiercely. "Is that where you meant her to be left?"

"Didn't I do well since she came to you —the hussy! Was there no woman she could have stayed with?"

"One," said Daniel loudly. "An embittered old maid who refused her help."

There was an angry sniff at the door.

Then he added quietly: "I walked the streets all night to let her have my room."

"The street is talking," the old man interrupted in his rage, listening to no explanations, and ignoring his part of the night's work. Indeed, it was his own shame he was venting on the young man—a shame he did not know how to draw his daughter from now he had entangled her in it before so many eyes. "The milk-boy saw her leaving your door at dawn to come home. She is disgraced in the eyes of the world. What do you propose to do? The right

thing is obvious. If you refuse, out she goes to the streets again."

"Why, you are mad, sir, you are mad!" Daniel stammered. "There is no scandal. I only did what I could for your daughter when you turned her from your door. There was no place else for her to go. What could I have done?"

"I want no talk," Moore thundered. "What are you going to do for the girl?"

Daniel, maddened, opened his mouth to tell the man he and his daughter might go where they liked as far as he was concerned, when a stifled sob stopped him short. He looked around, and there, in the shadow of the curtain, crouching as far as possible into the corner, was the poor girl herself.

"Come out of that and stand up!" Moore cried, seizing her by the arm, and dragging her to the light. "There's a sight for you. There's a respectable-looking girl!" he raged.

Daniel looked at the poor thing and melted. Her pretty eyes were red, her face full of deadly shame. She put her hands up to hide it—the innocent face that

had never had such a blush upon it before.

They stood, the poor things, learning from the lips of the old man how ready the world is to tear the hearts of the young; and so, not having eaten the forbidden fruit, they were condemned for their innocence.

"What do you intend to do with my daughter?" Moore said, as though he were the angel with the flaming sword driving the young people to disgrace.

Daniel looked at the shrinking girl with a sudden resolution, and without a moment's thought, answered laughing: "Why, marry her, of course!"

The girl drew back with a low cry: "Oh, father, it's impossible. I never thought you brought me over for this. I thought you came to thank him," she said weeping, and wished the ground would open and hide her.

But Moore did not heed her. He became quiet and subdued. He expected a row, but never an end like this. He thought by shaming the youth he might get out of

an unfatherly act in some way, or at least share the disgrace. The relief was great. He could almost have wept.

"You are an honourable man," he said, going to the window as if to conceal his emotion; "but I expected it of you—I really did." He turned in glee and went to the door. "I will tell my wife," he said cheerfully; "she will be so glad. You can follow me, darling," he said, turning to his daughter. "I expect you have something to say to each other." He banged the door, and went whistling down the stairs. Miss Simpkins's door shut with a snap as he passed.

"Two more daughters to get off my hands," he sighed, "and, the expense of them gone, I shall be able to live in the comfort I ought to have for my failing years. My darling Nora will have no money, but an honourable young fellow like that will not mind when he marries for love."

His darling Nora stood with a white face before Daniel as before her judge. "I have got you into awful trouble," she said; "but I am not going to marry you!"

"You must," he answered cheerfully. "You heard your father."

"You don't even know me." She spoke so low he could hardly hear her.

"Who ever knows the woman he is going to marry?" he said. "Why, it is all a lottery!"

"You are not very complimentary," she said proudly. "Besides, I have no idea of marrying you."

"Oh!" The young man was not satisfied at this. Now that he looked at her he felt there was no one else he wanted in the world. She was so pretty in her distress, and for her to refuse him, that made him wish for her at once. "I will give you a week to be ready in," he laughed, catching her hand.

"But you don't—don't care for me a bit," said the girl, bursting into tears. "I am a stranger to you!"

"Why, I have loved you for months," the youth answered, believing it. "I have watched you from my window, and loved you ever since I first saw you."

CHAPTER V.

Oh, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day!

SHAKSPERE.

THAT evening Daniel wrote to his aunt, telling her the whole story, and the next morning she arrived in a cab before he had left the house. She burst in upon him as he sat at breakfast, scattering in her whirlwind entry the landlady and the cat, both of whom were hanging round to get something from Daniel—the one information of the last night's doings, the other a bone. His aunt flung herself into a chair, facing him. She put the letter he had sent her on the table with a bang.

"Now what's this nonsense?" she said.

Daniel flushed. "It is no nonsense," he answered. "I don't understand you."

"You are not going to marry this girl?" His aunt glared at him.

"I am."

"I say you are not!"

Daniel's mouth closed in a forbidding line. He did not answer.

"Now, listen to me." His aunt endeavoured to moderate her anger. "Have you considered what you are doing, after the hard life of struggle you have had—in which, I may say, both of us have suffered; for have I not spent more than I ought to give you your chance? Now, when it seems things are a little better, when you have started on your career with every chance of success, you are going to throw all over in order to marry a girl you know nothing about, to go back to poverty—this time burdened with a wife."

"It's as easy to support two as one," he said stubbornly.

"Nonsense, nonsense," the old woman said. "I have heard that before: just as easy to feed two as one; then there's a child, and it's just as easy to feed three as two, and so on till it ends in the workhouse. And this girl's father is a drunkard. Have you thought even for a moment what may

happen if you marry this woman? Suppose she follows in her father's footsteps after a time, and drinks—what then, my young artist?"

"Please do not speak as if she were not a lady; she is a good, sweet girl."

"Oh, they are all that before you marry them."

"Now look here, aunt: even if I did not wish to do so, I should have to marry her, being a gentleman. People are talking of the poor girl, saying her father put her out for some reason—you know how stories grow—and how I took her in, and all the rest of it!"

"If you were a fool once, don't be a fool twice. You need not marry her. What is it to you if she is talked about?"

The young man rose indignantly. "A great deal, since I care for her." With all this opposition he felt his love grow for the absent girl. "And since she is to be my wife."

"Very well, marry a woman you know nothing about—nothing, except that she comes home at midnight, and is turned out

by her father, and he a drunkard. Oh, yes, rage if you will!" His aunt rose. "But think of the little four-roomed house in a back slum, the draggle-tailed wife, the dirty-faced children, and the threadbare bread-winner, who was once stepping from the mud up the ladder of fame and fell back."

She left the room, banging the door, and thought that Daniel's laughter followed her. She crossed the road, her face set and angry.

"Why should I bother about him?" she said to herself, "the ungrateful fellow. Yet I fancied he might some day make me proud of my connection with him, and return me some of the care, if not the affection, I lavished on him. If he marries this woman it is impossible."

She knocked at No. 7, and was admitted by a wondering maid-of-all-work.

"Is Miss Nora Moore at home?" she said stiffly, remembering the name her nephew had given her in his letter.

"She is, ma'am. Won't you walk inside?" The servant opened a door. "Who shall I say, ma'am?"

"Miss Macdermot—it doesn't matter, she doesn't know me." She spoke in the middle of the room. A scuffle marked the entry of the visitor, who stood looking round her, muttering—"Slatterns, I thought so."

The three Miss Moores and a friend were seated upon the floor with drawers and boxes surrounding them. Nora, with flushed face and untidy hair, was just rising from a dive into a dilapidated leather trunk. Finery of all sorts was scattered around. Most of it spoke of a long past.

"Miss Nora Moore?" Miss Macdermot said primly.

The girl stood up, looking a trifle bewildered, as if she ought to know her visitor and was apologising for her rudeness in not remembering her.

"I have come from my nephew," the old lady said, seating herself and frowning at the colour that came into the girl's cheeks, "to appeal to your good sense. You, of course, are not in earnest about this wedding?"

The girl did not answer, but looked a question.

"I am his aunt. I have provided for him since he was a child. Of course, he otherwise has not a penny or the prospect of one, so I come to warn you"—she tried to bring a smile to her face, but only succeeded in grimacing sourly—"what you have before you if you realise what you are doing; but perhaps my nephew has not told you of his means."

"I am not marrying him for money!"

"Is it to save yourself, then?" The aunt rapped out the question, then stammered to withdraw it on seeing the battery of indignant eyes turned upon her.

"Nora loved the young artist ever since he came to the house opposite," one girl said angrily.

"Loved, loved!" the old woman laughed. "Silly girls, do you know what love is, that you speak so glibly of it? To love a person you see in an opposite window and never spoke to—know nothing of, nonsense. And suppose you marry this young man with all this rubbish of loving him in your head; think what you will have to be: a drudge, a housekeeper, a general servant, a nurse-

maid, a seamstress, a cook, a valet—this is what marriage means!"

The girls smiled.

"You may laugh, but I tell you it is no laughing matter to marry a poor man."

"One can do a lot for a man if one loves him," Nora said softly. "Surely it would be only a joy to have a house of one's own and someone to care for you always."

"Someone to annoy you always, you mean!" snapped the old maid. "And someone to grow tired of you when you are no longer—young." She was going to say "pretty," but thought she would not give the girl that satisfaction.

"Married people grow more tender as they grow older," said Nora sagely; "more loved, I think. Age really only matters when one is not married." She stopped suddenly, remembering that this was Daniel's aunt, but she had not stopped soon enough.

"I am glad your experience of what you see of married life has proved so happy," the other said sharply, remembering the story Daniel had told her of old Moore's conduct to his wife and children. She

[illegible] with satisfaction the painful blush that came into the girl's drooping face. "Of course," she continued, rising, "I see it is no use speaking to you. I have given you my advice and told you my nephew will not have a penny; and remember, young woman, when you sneer at unmarried ladies it's sometimes more advisable to refuse to marry and be an old maid than to run after a man who does not want you, and ruin his chances in order to get a wedding-ring on your finger."

Nora covered her face with her hands and crouched down on the floor, but her fri[illegible] faced the old woman.

"You never refused a man," [illegible] [illegible], "so you need not pretend [illegible] No man would have risked [illegible] [illegible] to be refused."

Nora dragged her [illegible] [illegible]: "Hush, Mary, [illegible]

The old maid sailed [illegible] did not deign to [illegible] [illegible] as if to [illegible] [illegible]—but [illegible] such a [illegible]

loudly, and Nora burst into tears. She began to push the clothes back into the boxes.

"Of course, I must not marry him," she sobbed, rubbing her streaming eyes with the pieces of lace and silk as she put them away. "I did not know it was like this. I thought he cared for me."

The girls clustered round to comfort her. "Of course he cares. It's only that jealous old maid; she wouldn't have bothered coming if she did not know he did, and was afraid he would marry you. He has money and she wants to get it," one of them finished incoherently.

"I don't want his money, and I don't want him!" Nora said pettishly, a tremble still in her voice.

"Then we shall not have a wedding in the family, after all," her youngest sister whispered dolefully. "It would have been lovely to have had a wedding and a married sister, and we have pulled all our grandeur out for nothing."

Nora looked at the boxes regretfully. "I'd have worn the grey silk mother

had when she was married," she said tremulously.

"Oh no; better be married in a travelling dress," Mary answered.

"I would sooner have mother's dress," Nora replied softly; "it would be like having her arms round me."

"It was not a lucky dress," someone said, and a coldness fell over the group.

"She never had luck in it," sighed Nora.

"Well, we will decide on a travelling gown," said Mary, smiling cheerfully, "with 'something old, something new, something red, something blue' on you for luck."

"But I am not going to be married at all," cried Nora angrily, and as she spoke her mother entered—a careworn woman with a face all anxious lines. Her whole married life had been an effort to please her husband and keep him in good humour; she had forgotten when she had an individuality of her own, it was so long ago. She trembled when she beheld in her children any appearance of opposition to their father's will. Now she had heard what her daughter said, and turned to her.

"I don't know what to say, darling; your father seems set on this strange match. He says the young artist will have plenty of money from his aunt, and that he is a real good lad, always working, and never going about like others. He has inquired about him at the office where he was before he began to paint, and they spoke very highly of him there to your father. Your father is not getting on well just now, and he has heavy expenses, he says. We have rather a bad time before us. He promises to give you something for a trousseau; in fact, he has given me a cheque." She displayed it, to the wonder of the girls.

"I never saw so big a cheque before," said Nora. "How generous father is."

But her friend burst into a fit of laughter. "Ten pounds for a trousseau!" she said sarcastically. "Oh, it's generous! How will you make it do, Nora?"

Nora was not listening. In truth, her blood ran cold at sight of the cheque. It meant her father's last word. He had decided, and there was no more to be said.

"Mother," she whispered, "don't let

him make me marry. I am happy here."

The mother smoothed her hair.

"'Here' cannot last for ever, dear, and I would like my girls settled. Oh, you don't know how I worry for fear you should be left unprovided for, or make an unhappy marriage with a bad man." She stopped as if she had cast a reproach on her husband, or lest anyone should read in her mind that she was thinking of her own unsatisfactory married life. "Try and please your father. He will be vexed if you go against him." She shuddered, thinking of the anger that might follow.

"It does not seem to occur to anyone that there are two to be considered," Nora said bitterly. Never once had there been a mention of Daniel. There had been no question of his wish to marry. It was just everything to marry her off, she thought.

"I am sure he loves you dearly. How could he not?" her mother said, half ashamed. Truly, she only cared to see her daughter safe under some good man's roof before she died. She had not thought much about

his feelings, only of his character. "Your father says he is devoted to you."

"Nobody cares," Nora said, suddenly rising to her feet. "Nobody cares whether I love him or he me. You are all anxious to get rid of me. Not one of you has said, 'Do you love him?' You are only thinking"—she turned to her sisters—"of what I shall wear and what you will wear yourselves."

"You never thought of anything else yourself," retorted Kathleen, the youngest. "I don't believe that since you came into the room and began rummaging to see what we could use for the wedding you have thought once of Mr. Macdermot."

Nora blushed hotly. There was some truth in the remark. She left the room indignantly. "I have spent four hours discussing the dress I am to be married in, and during that time have hardly once thought of the man I am to marry. I can't love him, as that is so," she said, and she sat down and wrote him a letter, sealing it relentlessly.

For three days there was a brisk correspondence between the two, then it ceased abruptly.

CHAPTER VI.

The fool of fate—thy manufacture, man.—POPE.

IT happened at the end of the week that Daniel and Nora found themselves in the same train and in a carriage alone. Although appearing to turn her back upon him, Nora's eyes were studying his image reflected in the window, curious, and a little afraid of what might be the consequences of their prolonged quarrel. Watching him thus furtively, she found something in his face that she had not seen there before. At first, she was vain enough to think it was grief at her refusal; but on further perusal of his disturbed countenance she concluded that for the nonce the trouble was not disappointed love.

This distressed her. There was something, then, more important to him than herself. Jealousy moved her to speak.

"What is the matter?" she said, pouting as she saw him start as though he had not known she was there. He drew himself up as if remembering she was with him. He went to her side, and tried to take her hand.

"Nora, you are not in earnest about what you said in your letter. You will marry me, won't you?" Nora flushed.

"I am quite in earnest, and I am sure you will see how impossible it is if you think."

"It's like a woman," he said angrily, "to change her mind so quickly. My aunt lectures you, and you turn round in a moment, as if I were not to be considered at all."

Nora remembered the old lady's insults, and retorted quickly that she had quite made up her mind. Daniel, driven to extremes, replied as he had not intended.

"The landlady has asked me to leave my lodgings."

Nora flamed: "I am sorry to have got you into such trouble."

"And I you," he replied; and in a flash

Nora saw herself surrounded by difficulties that she had not thought of before. Why had one of the neighbours cut her dead that morning? And what long conversations the maids and milk-boys had, what giggles and glancings at the two houses. She thought of herself as she was that fatal night when she had realised her position on the doorstep. Everyone was talking, everyone would slight her. She felt a sudden rage against Daniel; there seemed no escape from him. She drew herself up, feeling that all was his fault, and that she must marry him. Indignantly and full of contrary humour, she cried melodramatically:

"I will never marry you!"

"Is this your last word?" he answered severely.

"Yes."

"Remember, I am not a man to be played with; I won't dangle after any girl," he said, with boyish earnestness.

"I am not playing," she said severely; "I say I won't marry you."

"That decides it. I won't ask you again."

They sat opposite each other in silence. Then the boyishness left Daniel's voice; it assumed the deep bell tone of suffering manhood. He accused himself for his selfish desire to possess her; praised her for her wisdom in refusing a stupid and most witless being, a hopeless and unsuitable failure. He gave her back her freedom, and withdrawing himself from the chase, thus brought down his game.

In a moment Nora's mood changed. This was not the way of a soul out of tune, but of one with whom the string of hope had snapped. The pathos of his voice drew tears into her eyes. She leaned over him, like a mother over a sick child; she moved nearer to him, and gazed full of pity into his sad face.

"I am sorry I was cruel. Won't you tell me what is the matter?"

"The matter is—I am a ruined man." The beardless youth without fortune felt there was no humour in his answer. "You know my picture? Well, the lady has refused to sit any more."

"Refused to sit?"

"Yes; she got tired of my muddling, I suppose. She only came three times and to-day sent a note to say it was impossible to come any more."

"And that is all the excuse she gave?"

He reddened and did not answer, but she pressed the question, curious and suspicious.

"My aunt says," he said through his teeth, "she believes it was because my sitter had heard stories of me, that I had been turned out of my lodgings, and—and—but I know it was not that; she had grown tired of sitting and seeing my picture was no good."

"And what do you intend to do now?" Nora interrupted, red as he.

"Go to London," he replied harshly. "A scamp like myself won't be noticed there. Start again at the bottom of the ladder and climb up—or down. Nobody cares which."

"May I go with you and help you—up?" Nora whispered timidly. "I could work."

He turned suddenly and caught her in

his arms. They clung together in their first realisation of true love, unselfish thought, the one for the other.

"I don't know whether it is wise for you," Nora said practically, too busy with her thoughts to heed his lover's rhapsody, "to marry me. You see, I have never had any money, so don't know the value of it, and I am sure I shall never know what to get for your dinner."

Daniel laughed. "Oh, bother housekeeping and bother dinner. We will take things as they come. I will make lots of money when I go to London."

"London! Oh, Daniel!" Nora's face changed. She looked out of the carriage window upon the fairy landscape flying by, shadowy mountains, and golden sea. "Leave Ireland, I don't believe I could; it will break my heart."

"Only for a time till I make my fortune," he answered smiling. "I want to make a quick fortune, so that we can enjoy it while we are young. Many have done it in London—why should not I?"

"You are ambitious," sighed Nora. "I

shall be afraid of you. A little fortune would do for me."

"Well, dear!" Daniel said softly, "we might make that at home; but my aunt says that there is a feeling against us here, and that we had better begin in London. She will give me three hundred pounds to start with; she knows I am determined to marry you, and longs to get rid of me. I shall take her money, though I hate to do it, but I will pay it all back soon."

"I wonder why she is so cross and hates me so?" the girl asked.

"Oh, she is not so bad as she appears; she is one of those women who have frozen hearts. But there is a heart there all the same. She has always helped me since I was a child and had no one to look to."

"So I heard, and so ungrudgingly and so kindly."

"Well, just now she is a bit upset. She had a great fancy for starting me as an artist, when she got over the shock of my insisting on leaving my clerkship. She takes a long time to change her mind from one idea to another. Now I have done something to

upset everything. She tells me all her friends are talking of the scandal in her family, and she wants me to clear out of Dublin altogether. She says no one would wish to know me now, and she fears that the discredit will fall on her, too; she is a most respectable old lady, and has rich friends whom she clings to, and she does not let them forget we were once as grand as they in the old days before our family squandered its gold. But you are crying, Nora dear! Why, it's only nonsense. It's her dotage, her imagination. Nobody knows anything; there's nothing to know. Don't cry."

But Nora would not be consoled. "What have we done that everyone should say things about us?"

"Nothing, child," he whispered, taking her hand; "we have done nothing, but the world is a cruel place for the young. We shall face it together, poor as we are and despised, and conquer it."

Nora smiled at this youthful optimist, and the train, bearing these victims of circumstances, steamed into the station. Did ever that matchmaker, Fate, drive a young couple together with more persistence than this?

CHAPTER VII.

A child of our grandmother Eve, a female; or, for thy more sweet understanding, a woman.—SHAKSPERE.

NORA sat at the window of the little house she and her husband had taken at Cricklewood; on each side she could hear her neighbours' loud voices. Brown on the right had come home drunk, she fancied; Robinson on the left was explaining to his wife at the top of his voice his desire for peace. Nora sat with her head upon her hands. Her face was soiled with the mark of tears. And what was she crying for? Such a foolish thing! She had gone out in the morning, her head full of domestic ideas and resolutions; and she had unfortunately taken all she had left of her housekeeping allowance money in her pocket. Poor fool, she had gone as far as Kilburn to buy goods for the week, to get as much as she could for as little money as possible; and

she had seen in a shop window a blouse. Now, there is nothing uncommon in that. But this was such a beautiful blouse, and just her colour, she thought. She hurriedly made some little purchases and turned for home, passing the fatal window again. She looked and yearned, fancying herself in the pretty green silk: it was probably a bargain. The card upon it said "Under cost price." She started for home, her feet lagging, her thoughts behind her. Suppose she went in for a reel of thread and asked the price of the blouse?

She turned and opened the shop door. A smart young man came up to her. "The price of the green blouse in the window?" He would inquire; meanwhile, would she walk this way?" She did. She was surrounded by young men and women. It was no trouble to take the article from the window. They would tell her the price in a moment. It was very cheap—quite given away. Would the lady sit down a moment till the young gentleman returned with the blouse?

"Oh, but I only wanted to know the

price," Nora answered feebly, trying to get away; "I do not intend to buy it."

Of course, there was no need for madam to buy it; but they would like her to see it. It was so pretty and so cheap. Here the young man returned with the temptation.

He spread it out upon the counter.

"That's what I would choose if I wanted a blouse," he said, admiring it. Nora drew the silk between her fingers. "It's good thick silk," the salesman said confidently; "and, really, it's a gift to whoever buys it. Only 10s. 6d., but worth 30s., and sold at that price at all other houses."

"It's pretty," Nora admitted; "but not as good stuff as I thought it was."

The shopman looked pitifully at her, seeing her ignorance. "The very best silk in the market. We sell the same silk at 4s. 6d. a yard in the silk department. This will not cut or tear like the kind usually sold for blouses at this price."

"Oh, but I don't want it," Nora said desperately.

The young man looked injured. He was sorry, but had not madam wished to see

the blouse? It was a most becoming blouse. He held it under his sallow chin—it made him look like a lemon with a face cut upon it. "Madam could see for herself: it would suit anybody." He was sorry he could not please madam; but he was sure if madam would look at some others he could suit her. Here was a very sweet crimson silk—the very best silk in the market, sold at their own counter for 3s. 6d. the yard—a great bargain, 8s. 6d., or did she care for blue better? Would she not at least try on the green blouse?

Nora turned from him helplessly. Behold, a young person was standing between her and the door, the green blouse over her arm. "Would madam kindly step this way for the fitting-room?" she said firmly.

Nora hesitated. She hoped the blouse would not fit, as that seemed the only path of escape. She would not take it if it did not fit; this would be her way of salvation. She saw them looking angrily at her, barely hiding their displeasure. She had given them a lot of trouble for nothing, their eyes said. She could hear the voice of another assis-

tant farther up the counter speaking to a customer. "No, madam, I am sorry we are out of navy spotted with white, but I have a very pretty red-flowered silk."

"But I want navy," the poor customer appealed.

"If madam will allow me, I think I can please madam." He dropped his voice confidently: "As a matter of fact, we are not doing navy-spotted just now; it won't sell. These are the newest colours. That one would suit madam perfectly."

The woman held a bright orange beneath her chin. "Does it really suit me?" she pleaded, her yellow face growing ghastly by the contrast.

"It is madam's colour." The salesman clasped his hands in his delight. The poor customer glowed beneath the admiration in his eyes.

Nora turned, and like a lamb going to the slaughter, followed upstairs the young woman who stood impatiently awaiting her.

"It is too big at the waist," she said, looking at herself in the glass. The girl pinched and pulled. "It could be taken in

here." Nora tried to look over her shoulder. There was no hand glass. "Does it fit at the back?"

"Perfectly, as if it were made for you."

"It's rather tight across the chest."

"It can be let out. See how full it is."

"And the armhole is not big enough."

"A ready-made cannot be expected to fit exactly, but this can be altered."

Nora felt the growing coldness in the tone. They had treated her as if she were the greatest lady in the land, and so flattered her vanity to get her to buy. Now when there was a chance of the victim getting away they tried other means of preventing her. "I'll call the fitter if madam will wait a minute."

"I'm afraid I really cannot take it to-day," Nora whispered. "In fact, I shall leave myself short of money if I spend so much on a blouse now—some other day," she continued with the usual faint-hearted plea of the shopper. "I shall call in again." But the excuse was easily overthrown.

"It will most probably be gone by to-

morrow; it is too good a bargain for many to pass over. If madam does not care to pay now, we shall be delighted to send the blouse to any address madam may give, and it can be paid for on delivery."

Nora slipped into her own dress. The saleswoman did not attempt to help her. She stood glaring at Nora with contemptuous eyes.

"The blouse is being given away—only half-a-guinea for a lovely creation like that!" she remarked, smiling. Her eyes said, "The idea of any lady thinking twice of such a trifle; but you are no lady, only a poor girl much beneath me. Why did I take all this trouble about you?"

Nora read her eyes. She became conscious that the girl was much better dressed than herself. The slight, almost imperceptible glance of the saleswoman at her headgear made her remember the shabby little straw hat pierced so often with pins at each side. She knew her boots were muddy, and became aware for the first time of a hole in her glove. Downstairs she had not once thought of these things—such is the

power of the human eye, provided it is feminine.

Nora grew dignified in her rage. "I shall take the blouse," she said haughtily. "Kindly make out the account, and I will pay now."

The girl was at once humble, and Nora might have been in silk attire from the deference her gaze expressed.

"I will call the fitter," she said. "We charge 2s. 6d. for altering."

"I will take it as it is."

The assistant was all smiles. "Will you please to pay downstairs?" She went off triumphantly, Nora following meekly, glad for the moment she had made up her mind and taken possession of the enviable garment.

As she sat waiting for her bill and the change from the eleven shillings she had given from her now empty purse, she could hear the hum of the shop buzzing round some poor victim.

"I am sorry we don't keep violet-sprayed silk for dresses," she heard the assistant saying stiffly, and a little woman, drawing herself out of a heap of tossed silks near,

rose up trembling. "We keep only the newest materials."

"I am sorry I gave you so much trouble, but it's to match the pattern." She went feebly from the counter where she had sat for half an hour forced to look at things she did not want. Nora watched her departing, envying her her strength of will.

"I would have bought the red with the flowers on it, or the yellow and blue stripe." She watched the angry shopman toss the silks into their places.

"Some people don't mind giving trouble," he grumbled; "I showed her every silk in the department, but could not satisfy her. We have the best selection in town."

"I am sure the blouse will please you," her attendant said. "Cannot I send it for you?"

"I will take it with me," Nora answered, waiting until they tied it up.

She took her place in the penny 'bus that was to carry her home. Seating herself with the precious blouse carefully laid upon her lap, she pensively regarded her fellow passengers, thinking about her purchase.

Money, money, money. She was beginning to realise what that meant now. Although always scarce with her in her father's house, yet it had never cost her a thought, only a sigh for some girlish amusement or ornament of which she was deprived. Its connection with the necessities of life she had not known: good food, clothes, home were all provided, and the arrangement of these things had never been in her hands. Now, with money in her pocket, she was continuously tempted by some womanly adornment that money told her she could buy, forgetting for the moment that to do so would leave something more necessary unattainable. And she had spent a good portion of her week's allowance on a blouse that she knew would have to be almost remade in order to fit her.

Suddenly she found herself eyeing a passenger opposite, and she tried to change the current of her thoughts by speculating as to how he could afford even a penny for his fare. His tightly buttoned coat told of some scarcity of clothing concealed; his trousers were frayed at the heel, and his

coat at the cuffs; his face was unhealthily fat with the bloated appearance of one who drank but did not eat well. Nora saw his eyes turned often to the feet of the lady beside her, and on the lady rising and going from the 'bus he leaned hastily forward and picked up a coin which she had evidently dropped. He picked it up carelessly, feeling that the eyes of the passengers were upon him; but the eagerness in his own, only half hidden, was quickly followed by a look of disappointment as he turned the coin.

"Nickel! I thought it was a threepenny bit," he observed with a careless smile, and fell into a discussion with his neighbour, a labouring man returning from his work. Nora listened in a dream: she saw the two men pass the coin one to the other.

"You are welcome to it," the ragged fellow said, with the air of a prince giving away a fortune. "It is of no use to me. It is not worth a penny."

Nora fancied a reluctance in his voice. Were it not for his pride—the poor pride that kept a spotless ragged collar over the torn,

tightly-buttoned coat, he would have whispered, perhaps: "Give it back that I may turn it in my pocket, and dream of things it would buy if it were silver." The other took the coin "for his children." If it had been gold in a lonely spot, Nora wondered, would it have gone from clinging hand to willing hand without a more tragic ending? She shivered as she stepped from the 'bus. It seemed to her as if she had for a moment robbed these people by buying unnecessary adornments when they perhaps were hungry.

She reached her little home in desperate spirits. Everything seemed to be wrong. The house was dreary and wretched-looking: a cheap, jerry-built affair with an affectation of show in the tiles over the door, and ornamental stone over the windows, that made its vulgarity more marked. It reminded Nora, as she fitted her key in the door, of a factory girl, who wore, instead of the simple attire her position demanded of her, the imitation furs and feathers which she seemed to think would make the world look upon her as a gentlewoman.

CHAPTER VIII.

Let not thy mind run on what thou lackest as much as on what thou hast already.—MARCUS AURELIUS.

NORA heard the loud voices of her neighbours through the thin walls. How dreadfully dull it was. The little, long hall; the dark dining-room; the hateful drawing-room, like a box looking out on her neighbour's clothes-line—and there was such a big family washing hanging up most of the week. She felt herself beginning to watch for new holes in Tommy's little knickers, and to see the tucks that were in Elsa's small petticoat being ripped out month by month as the child grew. Now Nora flung herself into a chair, and the silence of the house crept around her. What a change from the old life among her sisters, and her earlier home—ah, the laughter, the chatter of tongues, the quarrels, and then the delightful making up! What matter if at times

life were too full of movement; sorrows that had joys to follow were better than a life of even dulness. How she used to weep in those days, how she used to laugh! Now she neither laughed nor wept with the same passionate emotion. A miserable drop trickled down her cheek; but there was no use in crying, so finite and finished was her fate. To be free from hunger; to be free from cold; to give and have a little love—that was her life.

A little love, had she even that? Could she feel so bored and miserable if she loved her husband? And he—of course, it was impossible he ever cared. Had not her father made the match? Bah! what a life a woman's is—especially an ignorant woman who is reared for nothing but matrimony. She could not teach or make her living, anyway, so—she married. No; surely it was not that—ah! poor Daniel, what was this she was thinking? Why, she loved him, of course, and would think of him only kindly. There was plenty of time for thinking of him all day alone, without a friend, in a small, common house, where they lived on little

over two hundred a year. How lonely it was to be left at eight in the morning by a man who when he returned home at eight at night was too tired or too busy to talk to one.

How long could she live like this through the awful loneliness?—she sat now as she had sat often during the six months of their married life, discontented and grumbling aloud to fill the silent place with some sort of sound. "To think that I might creep up to my bed and lie there till I died, and no single soul would come to help or speak to me. All day long I must live so for years, and nothing will change but ourselves. I shall grow grey and wrinkled, and every day I shall sit like this in this little room and look at the ugly things it contains—those high-backed chairs that stand against the wall like stiff old maids staring at me, and the fat armchairs that ogle me; and listen to the old clock counting out so viciously my hours: 'another day gone' and nothing gained, only death a little nearer, and the beautiful world you want to see fading away; and Daniel will come

home, his face more aged and serious, with no news to tell me. To-day it is—'I think I am doing something good, dear,' and to-morrow, 'I have failed again,' and for amusement, what?—going into London to rub against the wealthy at least? No, sixpence a day for 'buses made even that impossible." Well, she could take down curtains and wash them and put them up again, and for fear her brain would grow sluggish she could plan dinners and suppers three hundred and sixty-five days every year; and for exercise each morning dust the maiden chairs and the fat arm-chairs and the depressing clock till the dust falls too heavily for her and she is covered and crumbles away herself.

A timid knock disturbed her soliloquising. She got up slowly from her chair.

"Oh, bother that old Miss Mathews. I know her knock." She opened the door, and an elderly woman entered—a poor little body in a faded green dress, her thin grey hair twisted into a hard knot under her neat, shabby bonnet. Her small face had none of the beauty of old age; like a leaf

that had withered suddenly without the soft changes of autumn she was passing now into the late years of her life, a commonplace, faded little woman in an unfashionable faded dress, all her beauty hidden in the heart that throbbed within the little body.

"I came to see if I could help you, Nora," she said timidly, as if asking a favour. "I see your girl is out this evening."

"You are awfully kind," Nora said gratefully; "everything seems to be going wrong to-day."

"That's bad, my dear; everything ought to go right with a newly-married woman." Miss Mathews laid her jacket aside, and was beginning to spread the cloth. Nora sat wearily watching, and let her do it without helping. She felt too tired to move. "'Woman,' I said," continued Miss Mathews, "and it's only a girl you are."

"'Woman' is right," Nora replied. "When a person is married she becomes old at once. I seem hundreds of years older than I was last year. I feel as if I could not dance or run without looking like old Miss Williamson. She is grey-haired and

wrinkled and is at least fifty years old; but she runs about like a girl and looks so silly."

"What is wrong to-day, Nora? You are not always so melancholy," Miss Mathews looked at the downcast face admiringly. She loved beauty, and looked upon it as one who was hungry would look upon food.

"Oh! nothing or everything. For one thing, I bought a blouse."

"Well, that's not very terrible."

"It is. It's very terrible when you have no money to waste. I am tired of pinching and slaving, and it's so hard not even to be able to buy what is necessary; and it is equally hard to resist buying what is not necessary. Do you know, shops remind me of webs full of dewdrops; and when we poor women flies are attracted by the sparkle, a horrid old spider of a shopman springs out and drags us inside, and there amongst the silks and laces he sucks every bit of money out of us. But I suppose you," she added doubtfully, "have never felt like that —as if you must have pretty things?"

"I don't care much for pretty things,"

said Miss Mathews sadly. "They were never much temptation to me. You see, I never had anyone to care enough about me to bother how I looked, and then—I was always ugly. I think ugliness is more marked if you decorate it."

"You are not ugly," Nora said indignantly; "a kind, gentle face gives more pleasure than a beautiful one."

Miss Mathews turned away her eyes; they were full of tears. The sudden ring of feeling in the young voice came with delight to her ears. It was like the far-off bell of some lovely city to a traveller who has dreamt of its wonders, yet who might never enter its gates. This was the great golden city of love. And Miss Mathews stood through the years a beggar outside, never to be driven away, always striving for an entrance against the bars.

"What a child of moods she is," thought the sensitive soul; "yet I am sure she hates to look upon me sometimes. I am like a shadow beside her loveliness."

She had an exaggerated notion of the girl's beauty. Nora indeed had much sweet

Irish prettiness, but was by no means the goddess Miss Mathews had idealised her into in her own mind. She had come to love her in the way some women do who have grown old without having had an outlet for that affection of which she fain would be a spendthrift. She loved with that deep admiration so much less critical and more lasting than the love of men.

"But what can a woman do?" continued Nora, intent on her grievance. "All day alone, she is bound to get into mischief. I get up to breakfast. Then Daniel goes, and for the rest of the day I clean or dust or sew, and the hours go so slowly and spread endlessly into the future, with absolutely no interest in them. I wonder do all women feel like that, or is it only myself? You see, I don't know much about painting or anything, so do not take a bit of interest in Daniel's work from an artistic point of view. I say his things are splendid and all that to please him, but in my heart I don't know if they are worth anything. And I am not clever; I can't take up any work that is really interesting,

so must just stick to dusting. If we were only rich I expect I should not feel so dull."

"You ought to go out into the air more, and see the people—it would keep you from getting so depressed," Miss Mathews said kindly.

"If I do I begin to envy people with money—people who can take a cab when they grow tired, and have servants to keep the house nice, so that when they get home they can rest instead of starting work; and then I finish up my day by seeing some pretty thing in a window, which I pass because I can't afford it, and then go back to see if it really was as pretty as I thought. And then I go in and—there it is!" said Nora, breaking the string of her parcel and pulling out the blouse.

"Ah! but you will look pretty in it," said Miss Mathews, holding it up to the girl's face. "Your husband will admire you in it so."

Nora thought tenderly of Daniel. "I wish he was not away so much," she said. "It would not be so dull if he were here."

"I think it must be delightful to keep a

house for the man one loves. I think nothing could be more beautiful than fixing things for his comfort, keeping a little neat nest for him to come and rest in when he is weary, to feel I have made it a Heaven for him," said poor plain Miss Mathews, raising her pale eyes to the ceiling.

Nora laughed. "I don't see anything delightful in domestic duties. I'd sooner be going to—to—to any amusement with the man I love than staying at home darning his socks and dreaming of him. After all, even a man begins to grow commonplace when you have dwelt upon the wonder of his having married you for most of the day. Towards tea-time you begin to want a change of thought, if only for an hour or two."

Miss Mathews looked pained.

"I know the sort of woman you are," Nora continued flippantly. "You would be quite content to have nothing more in your life than the sole possession of one man. To light in the morning the very fire to keep him warm, to breakfast him, to brush his coat and hat, see him off from the steps, calling

after him to be careful not to get his feet wet and to be sure to take the lump of sugar with its six drops of camphor on it that you had put into his pocket in case he might possibly get cold. Then you would sit down to your cup-of-tea lunch, and worry and plan what he would like for his dinner. If he were a minute late you would fuss about between the clock and the window, wondering what could possibly have happened to him. You would have awful shivers up and down your poor little spine, at the suggestions of your imagination. You would have made yourself a widow a dozen times before he comes to the door, cross and quarrelsome. You would take his coat and hat, and, yes—even unlace his boots. Then when he drew the only armchair to the fire and seated himself therein with his feet on the fender, all the rest of the evening you would be content to sit opposite to him, darning his socks, and looking lovingly at him, while he slept away the indigestion of his meal and the boredom of your presence."

"I hope you don't speak from experience of men," Miss Mathews said, a little

sharply. "I am sure your husband is neither cross nor selfish."

"Oh, all men are," Nora said vaguely, "after the honeymoon is over."

"I don't think women always understand the difference between being cross and being weary."

Nora looked a little ashamed. "Women are tired, too," she said; "but don't take me too seriously. I say nothing about Daniel. He is very good, though he is not always as amiable as he was."

The old maid smiled. "'Bear and forbear,' I have always heard were the keys to the doors of happiness and content. They only mean a little reason and unselfishness."

"Did you ever love any man?" Nora said thoughtlessly, and the other's face flushed a sudden red. "You did?" She pressed the timid truth, seeing that signal of distress. "Tell me all about it."

"There is nothing to tell," the little woman answered, fighting her corner, but Nora would not let her off. "Imagine that little grey thing having had a romance," she

thought, then said aloud, "Why did you not marry him?"

"He went away," Miss Mathews answered softly, "to make his fortune."

"And never came back," Nora said scornfully.

"He did, he did," Miss Mathews spoke sharply. "He came back."

"And what happened?" Nora questioned, interested.

"He came back one day. He was well dressed, and had plenty of money. He took me out and we went up the river. We spoke of the old days before he went away. I could not at first get him to talk of the future and of the work he had done. He said he did not care to remember any time when I was not with him; but at length, seeing I wanted to hear of his fortunes, he began to talk of them. Oh, he was wonderful! full of stories of the lands he had been in and things he had done! He parted from me that night almost with tears, swearing he would return for good in six months, but we never met again; he never came, nor did I hear from him or of him any more."

"He was very cruel," Nora said sympathetically.

"I cannot believe he meant to be; he was so tender, so loving, to me that day."

"Did you love him very much?"

"I—I——" Miss Mathews laughed tremulously, "I would have darned his socks and been glad only to gaze upon him in the evening when he came home tired. You know I am one of that kind of woman."

Nora pressed her hand sympathetically and apologetically.

Miss Mathews turned dreamily to the window. "I often wondered——" She paused.

"You wondered what?"

"I often thought perhaps it was his ghost, he being dead, that came to comfort me that day. I had been so miserable."

Nora laughed. "Was he not too solid for a ghost? Possibly he had married during the time he had been away, and then, regretting it, had taken a day from his imprisonment to spend with you."

"I don't know," Miss Mathews said, distressed. The poor old story brought into

the glare of discussion for the first time wounded her more than she had thought. It seemed a sacrilege to that tender grief so long hidden in her heart of hearts—to talk of it aloud. She drew her cloak around her and prepared to go.

"Mr. Macdermot will be coming in, and I must hurry away," she said. She always liked to disappear when Daniel arrived. She felt old and dowdy, afraid of men, and always dumb before them. What had she, a poor stupid creature, in common with this other wonderful creation that ruled the world, and whose eyes never dwelt upon her except by accident, and then no longer than was necessary?

"Do not worry any more," she whispered to Nora; "it is only because you are not very well."

Nora's pale face flushed as the old maid laid her hand upon her. "You are very blessed," Miss Mathews said softly; "and soon you will be very happy and thankful."

"No!" Nora replied fiercely. "I hate it, and I—I am afraid."

CHAPTER IX.

Of joys departed,
Not to return, how painful the remembrance!
BLAIR.

MISS MATHEWS went into the street, agitated by her little display of emotion. She thought tenderly of Nora, and yet a new feeling was upon her that she had never felt before. Jealous—yes, she was jealous, or envious, she, the ugly old maid, of this young wife, who was full of tears because she had been one chosen and blessed by God. "And I who can never have chick nor child must go hungry always," she said, "and know of the joy of motherhood only in dreams." Oh, the little young thing that lay in her arms all night and called this poor maid, "Mother," that was gone as soon as the day came, and left no trace, not even the moisture of its kissing lips on the thin breast that had held it through the dark!

"Blessed are they amongst women," she whispered. "Every woman is blessed who has such a gift."

A drunken creature passed, dragging a child beside her; the little thing was covered in rags and muddied to the knees. The drunken woman lurched and sang. And every time she staggered the child, jerked this way and that, shrieked in merriment, thinking she was in play.

"Blessed amongst women. I would have made him clean and good with all my thoughts and heart. O God, Thy ways are sometimes hard to understand." Miss Mathews hurried down the street, the wheels of her quiet life all disturbed. The story that had become almost a dream memory whirled in her brain with all the old vitality and torture. "If I knew he was even alive and happy; but not to know anything—perhaps it is true what Nora said: he has married someone else. Why not? Oh, Willie, Willie!" she cried aloud, and was aroused to her surroundings by boyish laughter, "Willie, Willie!" The name pursued her up the street. Poor soul, the one

thing her heart cried most for was denied. She asked for love. And even those who liked her best had no love for her. She was so utterly commonplace; no one thought she had these longings. She lived alone in the small house her income afforded, and for employment of her time looked round, seeking those who would permit her to help them; and as there were many who wanted to get something for nothing her hands were full all day. Only, in the evening when the home life began she could not be pressed to stop, but would slip away in the darkness to her own lonely fireside. To growing children she was an object for jeers. She always avoided them. And they, seeing she was afraid, lay often in wait, with all the cruelty of the young who have not yet learnt to feel or understand more than their own sorrows.

As she went homeward a stray cat peeped from a gate; it looked up and down the street; and, seeing no one except the gentle, old Miss Mathews, slunk hastily along the wall. Its trust was ill-advised; for it had not gone a yard upon its way before the

wretched, thin, mud-bespattered outcast was followed by a stone. Miss Mathews gave a little cry of rage. A boy was leaning in a doorway; he was lame. At his feet purred a pretty Persian kitten. Miss Mathews hurried past.

"Even a lame boy would have crippled you. Why! because you are ugly, ugly, ugly, and worthless." The poor animal, hearing her soft calling, came to her, dumbly rubbing herself against the wall, grovelling before the miracle that had brought kind words upon her, yet ever avoiding the hand stretched to comfort her, ever suspicious lest it was only a ruse. The lost cat followed the lonely woman into her house, ready to spring away at the least sign of roughness, and yet only too eager to believe and hope that here were home and safety at last.

Miss Mathews fed her, pleased to see her eat. "Poor ugly thing, you are like me. Ugliness is the unforgivable sin of the world. Because you are unfortunate people stone you; because you are ugly you are unfortunate. You would not have been left straying and starving if you were pretty; and

he would not have forgotten and left me had I been beautiful."

Then she fell to musing and wondering over the old story, giving question and answer to her thoughts. So the ugly cat took courage, and crept to her feet, and the ugly woman reached down and lifted it to her lap. There they both sat long, gazing into the fire, till the room became dark and the shy moon stole reluctantly into the sky outside.

CHAPTER X.

Now that I want thy help most,
All of thee. BROWNING.

NORA went into the hall to greet her husband. This little excitement, which she looked forward to all day, being over, they came in together, hand in hand, like children, to sit down to their evening meal. This Nora had prepared; but it was not very appetising, and Daniel ate little, turning over the food upon his plate in a way that hurt Nora's feelings, though she said nothing.

They were still upon their honeymoon, as one could see by the way their chairs were drawn together, leaving only room to eat in comfort. Nora sat admiring him with her eyes.

"And how do the pictures get on?" she questioned. His brows clouded.

"Not well. I cannot get sitters, and I

cannot pay my share of the studio unless I do soon. I am doing some black-and-white work which I think I can sell. I am going to see a man about it this evening."

"You are not going to town again to-night?" Nora's voice fell.

"I must go, dear."

"You can see him to-morrow just as well," she said rebelliously, with a woman's disregard for duty. "I won't be left by myself all the evening."

Daniel moved his chair back and away from her. The clink of the chains thus put upon his actions irritated him—he was used to being his own master.

"It is necessary I should see him," he said, rising. And then a remark of an old comrade of his came to him. "Put down your foot at once if you are going to lead; I did not, and you see how it is." He thought of that browbeaten friend who had married a woman as unlike Nora as possible—and turned to his wife, who with all her faults was lovable and loving, who being young wanted to be amused, and having a

tender heart asked for constant expression of affection.

"Besides, I won't be hen-pecked."

All Nora's feathers went up; she brought her chair to the fire and turned a cold shoulder upon him.

He looked at her as he went out, but she did not pretend to notice: he hated a sulky woman.

He banged the door as a last protest, and Nora shrugged—she expected him to return and apologise; but he did not.

With such little quarrels these ignorant young people were meeting the first rough waters of their married life; the most trying year was upon them, like a rough wind; just now they were in the surf. That the calm ocean was beyond they did not yet know. The priest had blessed the little marriage vessel as he launched it upon the wide waters of wedlock. He had spoken to the young couple playfully, yet earnestly.

"I am putting you out on an ocean where there are many voyagers. May yours be amongst the happy crafts; with love as your pilot you are always safe. Be patient

with one another at first, till you know each the other's soul. You, being young and impatient for happiness, may forget there is no unsullied joy in the world. If you rock a moment in the surf, pull together, young mariners. Steady when the extra weight falls upon you, man. Woman, let your voice be cheerful, that he may know you are glad for his company, and are there to help him. Pull together, each to save the other. Let the sweat come and the tears; they are but passing troubles for the sake of your own happiness. Pull the vessel through the surf, through the first new years of married life, so that in the settled, calm days to follow you may know and understand that the difficulties were not made by each other, but only—that life has much sorrow; sorrow which grows to a grey clouding of storm, or pales till it seems as though the sun shone behind it, according to how bravely you face it. Soon you will know that one of you is lost without the other. You will turn to each other for help and comfort. Be your sailoring good, your craft is safe, for its perilous short journey to that distant

country from which no man has returned to tell us of. Many you will meet—dead faces drifting from their wreckage. Many you will see, struggling and clinging to their own overturned vessels, striking at each other and falling apart to drift alone to destruction. A dangerous, turbulent sea for you, young mariners; a lifelong misery if you have the wrong companion aboard. But the one eternal heaven upon earth if you have chosen well. Blow winds, break waves, you cannot shake asunder these locked hands. Meet grief with singing, and care with laughter. There is but one sorrow to meet with tears, and God only, who smiles upon you from His Heavens, can comfort and explain, when you rise and cry to the skies, 'I am alone.'"

Little had the young people, just starting on their new experience, heard of the good priest's long exhortation, and now, when his words might have been of some use, neither thought to recall them.

It was natural that they, selfish as the young often are, because they have been asked for little sacrifice and known little of

the sobering sorrows of life, should begin to change when they found that marriage did not give them the freedom they had imagined, but rather was a perpetual reminder of duty, a demand each on the other.

Daniel, used to living for himself and having his days to plan as he willed, chafed at the continual strain on his attentions. The other person wanted to know where he was going, and why; what he was doing—ay, even his thoughts were hardly his now. Share, share, share. Naturally a reticent man, he was annoyed at being questioned about what he did not feel inclined to tell of his own accord. Self-contained, the other was no necessity to his spirit; he was used to doing for himself in his masculine, inefficient way. Even personal comfort did not attract him now as it would when with years and age the body would remind the spirit that it was time it should be considered also.

He was not used to someone coming in upon him when he sat dreaming his dreams in beloved solitude. Indeed, there was no room to dream in the little house, no room apart to be his own; and if there had been,

Nora would not have respected his wish for silence, nor understood he still loved her when he shut himself away from her. She cheerfully chirped after him wherever he went, sitting on the arm of his chair and chattering. At first he was attracted by the novelty; then came his need for silence, to dream his possible masterpieces and think out many plans for his life. She was like a garden of singing birds. And he was imprisoned. He wanted solitary arbours and silence; he had no patience to understand that time would probably put things right. Nora, who was used to chattering and flying where her light heart took her—into the homes and love of her friends—never knew there were moments when she could be unwelcome to a soul who meant no unfaithfulness in its love of solitude. At present they both were cultivating that arch enemy to married happiness—selfishness, and the great love both were capable of was only half-awake within their hearts.

Now, Daniel, going back to town, began to think of Nora. In spite of himself, his little difference with her upset him. He did

not like to feel they had parted in anger. He could not understand his irritable ways with Nora, and blamed himself now that they were over.

"I suppose it's only because my life is changed so completely. I will try and be gentler. Probably it's only my youth and inexperience that make me irritated with her at times; at heart I am full of gratitude that life has given me for my own a living creature who loves me. I will try to have more patience. After all, it is her love that demands so constant an attention, which is jealous of all calls that take me from her. She, being a girl, was never bound to understand the responsibility of duty as the world knows it, but puts her love first, and serves it with her life itself. Poor child! It is no wonder she does not want me to go out, being alone all day. If I could only get on quicker we could have a house with a studio attached, and I could be more with her."

Then he began to think of his work, getting more and more depressed. All his dreams! what had become of them? He was working hard to keep a home now. The

dreams were to wait a bit till he had time to play. After all, it was a big sacrifice he had made, though Nora did not know of this. To set his dreams aside and work for money, this was a grievance continually dwelt upon, sometimes with rebellion, more often with pride, since it was for her sake he felt he was doing it. He thought of the half-finished picture standing with its face to the wall, and then of those wretched black-and-white drawings that had robbed his time from it. He was now going to see a friend who had promised to take them to an editor he knew. And he ran up the stairs eagerly to his friend's artistic chambers not far from Piccadilly. William Wendover was a poet of minor quality. To Daniel he represented one of the best of fellows, and his soul went out to one who could traverse the celestial heights of dreams. In many hours of depression he had sat with this man, and fancied in the silence his friend knew and sympathised with his despair, and after he had gone William Wendover would write long into the night, now an ode to melancholy, beginning:

"Thou who hast sat beside me through the night,"

or again other verse inspired by the gloom of his friend's misery.

Now, as Daniel came into the room, he rose and confronted him with a doleful face.

"Well, old man," he said, "these editors are absolutely ignorant of taste for anything good. It's useless trying to lift them, and through them the public. Art is dead in London, and poetry nearly so. Unless you have the fortune or misfortune to attract attention by a trick, and get taken up as a fad, just devote your time to pot-boiling. Any stuff is good enough if it's sensational or immoral——"

"Which all means, my drawings are returned?" said Daniel with a whitening face.

"You are young; you can afford to wait." Wendover threw the bundle of drawings on the table.

"No man with a home and a wife can afford to wait." He flung himself into a chair, his face in his hands. The bitter disappointment and a dawning fear clutched at his heart.

"Well, I was mistaken in my editor, and

I told him so," Wendover said. "I thought he knew true Art when he saw it. He said he knew his public better than I did, and I said I was glad of that if they only liked the commonplace stuff he printed. We had quite a quarrel over you." He spoke in a satisfied way as though what he had done should have made up to Daniel for his failure.

"I told him it lay in his hands to lift the public, not to go down to them; but he would not see it. The fact is, no one will risk the chance of a little sacrifice to give a nation a soul. Look at the stage, look at literature, look at art—all are bad, none can rival the past masters. Now they cry we must please the public. If they combined to give only the best, the public would be forced to take it, and so become educated to higher ideals in time. Don't you think so?"

Daniel raised his head without answering. He had not heard a word.

"My dear fellow," Wendover continued, "don't be downhearted. After all, it is better they threw you out as a true artist, than that they had made a little god of you,

as they love to do to the newly-discovered genius. Why, they might have dragged you from your obscurity and placed you upon a pedestal, worshipped you for a season, and the next year come round and pelted you with their criticism, wanting to know who put you up on that pedestal, bidding you come down, as they had found a greater god than you ever were to fill it."

Daniel rose wearily.

"I think I will go home," he said. "My wife gets very lonely by herself."

"I suppose she amuses herself, shopping and housekeeping when you are out," Wendover answered carelessly. He had no interest in this unseen wife, probably a commonplace creature such as many men marry when they are young for their bright colour or pretty eyes—women who soon, under the influence of poverty, develop into down-at-the-heel scolds, or with success become even in their middle ages more vulgar and impossible than ever.

"I am afraid she does not care for housekeeping, and as for shopping she has not much chance, poor child."

"Well, well, I never knew a woman who admitted caring for housekeeping; they all say they hate it; they don't take their responsibilities like we do," said the poet, who spent his life in doing nothing more serious than stringing rhymes.

"She is very young," Daniel replied tenderly. "You have not seen her yet. She is so pretty—too pretty for the dull life I have to offer her, hidden away without society or friends."

"Bring me to see her," Wendover said eagerly; "you know I like pretty women."

Daniel frowned. "I never like that flippant tone you sometimes use, Wendover," he said at the door.

Wendover laughed. "I'll go with you to-morrow evening," he called after him.

Daniel forgot him; his head had begun to ache under the strain of the worry he commanded it to bear. He had only a little money left, and if his sketches did not sell, good-bye to his life as an artist. He could not afford to wait and struggle in a garret now. Willingly for Art's sake he would have slaved and thought nothing of poverty

with the hope of a future before him; but that clinging, healthy, beautiful woman at home must be fed and housed and cherished, nor forced to wait upon this reluctant mistress, Art. He closed his eyes, and for the moment it seemed as if the two stood before him and bid him choose: Art, lovely, alluring, remote; now her eyes full of dreams, a creature to see and not forget, one to draw the heart-strings, to create the soul, one to slave for in hunger and poverty, in despair, even if one died in her service without grasping a feather from the golden departing wings—and Nora, Nora the wife, the warm, glowing, wonderful flesh, the creature made for man in the garden, to give him completeness, she who represented Home. He turned towards her, holding out his hands; something whispered, not love, but duty, made him do so; for his eyes still followed the flight of the departing muse. "Love," he whispered again, and shook himself, opening his eyes.

"Nora will represent tea and bread without butter, if I don't take care," he said, opening the door of his little house.

He felt cross and weary. Why did she not meet him and put her arms around him? The memory of one day of his babyhood came to him—a bitter trouble was upon him then. What it was he could not remember. All he knew was some arms had received him, some breast sheltered him, some forgotten face bent over his hair; the baby lips could not explain their sorrow, but without a word he was understood. To-night he was a child, selfish and unreasonable; he wanted his own troubles eased with sympathy. To no one could he tell, with his close and uncommunicative nature, all his grief, his fears for the future, if he failed as he felt he was doing, his great fear that he was without talent and had made a mistake in his vocation. Bodily fatigue and brain weariness assailed him; tired and cross as a child, he wanted that breast that had understood; but the older head, the unselfish love, it was not there. He opened the parlour door and found another child full of loneliness and tears.

"A man does not expect to come home after his day of hard work to tears," he said

crossly; "he expects his wife to be ready to cheer him up."

Nora laughed bitterly. She had been expecting his arms and his kisses. She had been weeping indeed, but most of those tears had fallen in the desire to see him and ask his pardon for their last quarrel; now her repentance was changed to anger at his words.

"Men think women are only puppets, to dance when commanded," she sneered, raising her reddened eyelids and glancing severely at him. "Will you have some supper?"

"I will have some coffee," he said, taking up a paper and beginning to read it.

She rang the bell. The servant bounced into the room with a tray and set it noisily on the table, leaving the room with a quick bang of the door.

"What's the matter with that woman?" Daniel said, frowning. "How dare she behave like that?"

Nora flushed red. "She knows."

"Who on earth told her?"

"I suppose I did," Nora answered timidly.

"I did not think she would take it up as she has. She has been horrid to me ever since. I was almost afraid of her till you came in," she added brokenly.

"What are you women made of?" he stormed angrily. "To talk to a servant about one's private affairs. Now it will be all over the place in various forms of lies, and do me a lot of harm. I did not think you would confide in a servant."

"It's all very well," Nora answered as crossly, though a soft word would have broken her; "but in the house all day, with only one other human being, one begins to talk and say more than one intends. I thought she was different. She seemed so sympathetic, and I was so lonely, that I began talking of home; she had the whole story before I knew I was telling it to her. She was very clever; she only wanted to find out about us, I suppose."

Daniel suddenly calmed. "She will have to go, anyway. I cannot afford servants."

He rang the bell, and the slattern appeared.

"We shan't require you after to-day."

The woman gaped; her face twisted in her strain to think of some impertinence.

"Leave the room."

She vanished, banging the door.

Nora shuddered. To-morrow she would have to face the storm alone. Daniel looked at her; his face changed.

"The poor little one," he thought; "how I am scolding her!"

"Can you do without a girl for a little?" he said gently. Nora brightened immediately at his smile.

"Oh, easily, if you can eat my cooking."

"You cook beautifully," he replied, with an inward qualm. Nora seated herself upon the arm of his chair and was drawn to his knees.

"Is there some trouble, dearest?" she murmured softly.

"Nothing to speak of, only it's harder to make a fortune than I thought. But we shall get through all right, so don't worry."

"You must be recognised soon, because you do paint beautifully. I never saw anything so lovely as your picture, when it's——"

But Daniel stopped the praising mouth with kisses.

CHAPTER XI.

A brave man struggling in the storms of fate.—POPE.

DANIEL threw himself wearily out of bed. This was the seventh morning of his new work. He had taken a clerkship in the City. The coming of a little child had brought illness and debts to his house. Nothing more? Ah, yes! something that he could not know of, who had not experienced the pains of birth and the hope of a happiness which would make them forgotten. Nora's childhood had slipped away; from the bed where she had lain down, rebellious and afraid, she rose with crying for that sweet burden which she had dreaded till it came. She rose a woman with infinite tenderness for all weak things for the sake of those little helpless fingers that for a moment were clasped about her own; and she had lost them. Someone had taken them away almost

as she drew them to her lips. There was no answer to her appeal, "Let me have my baby," only silly, soothing words that meant nothing. "Surely you will give me my little son; I have suffered so for him."

Then she understood. Daniel came in, and, holding her hands, strove to give comfort in his man's way. "Perhaps it was for the best. We have so little to give a child; we have very little to live on, dearest."

"You do not know what you are saying: a life has gone out."

He had not known the little one, she thought, all those months. To him a momentary peep at a pitiful little wrinkled face, a thrill of pride, a sudden wish to hasten away and leave it to the women. A son had been born to him, and was dead—hardly a tear while the dear woman was alive. He had no time to grieve for another burden which had nearly been thrust upon him. For this little son he had to put aside his brushes and go back to the hateful drudgery of the desk. God, what a sacrifice! All his dreams gone, save one—that picture

he flew to in his few idle moments. The picture he was going to make his name by, and so become great; leave him this, and his sacrifice was possible.

In his heart he would not admit Art had a greater hold upon him than the love and duty he owed at home. It was not possible. But Art, it clung, it clung; he could not give it up; he felt that he had talent, only his chance had not yet come. The morning hours, before his dreaded office work took him, he devoted to his picture. That picture was now in the little house, taking up the best room, because its slave could no longer afford a studio for it. Yet what sacrifices Daniel had made this lovely mistress suffer. A week ago Nora had asked for grapes, and some of his colours wanted replacing. What a position for a man to be torn by such things. A few precious shillings, and grapes or paints to be bought with them. He prided himself upon his strength. Nora got the grapes, and his brushes lay idle for a week—a whole long week—and when at last he could buy his own desires, he flew back to his painting, sobbing.

Nora went like a ghost for a time, full of her grief. At first she pursued Daniel for his sympathy, till she saw he could not understand.

"Daniel," she would say, "do you think he knew?"

"Knew what, dear?" he would answer, absently.

"That he was coming for so short a time? He was so sad. Do you remember his poor little pitiful face?"

"A baby of that age feels nothing," he replied, only half listening. He had told her this so often without any hope of convincing.

"Do you think he knew me, Daniel; that I was his mother?"

"Of course not. Children don't know things when they are so young."

"But his little hands clung to me so. I think he wanted me to save him, but I could not—I could not." She would break into tears. Then Daniel would fling his brushes aside and try to comfort her. And these precious hours he would have to rob from the morning with his picture.

Then Nora, seeing his mind was only half with her, though his generosity bid him stay beside her, drew her grief into her own heart. Like all souls, she suddenly realised that in great suffering one must stand absolutely alone, and such a loss as hers no other could understand. Daniel was left almost unmoved by the catastrophe. He was too young a man, and had too strong an individuality to feel that weariness of life or unselfishness of character which makes some wish to efface themselves and live again in their children. He had no wealth or name to desire a son to glorify and carry on both. Absolutely absorbed in his own work, he gave his affections little chance to widen. To her, the woman he loved, he began to give less and less expression of his devotion, with the familiarity of her presence. The whole force of his soul was turned to his Art, that fickle, evasive mistress who left his heart torn between hope and despair. Anxiety about his wife and pecuniary troubles had aged him; but of the poor little red-faced, wrinkled creature that for a few minutes he had seen and

called "son," he thought seldom. He had almost forgotten the momentary emotion of pride at his coming and grief at his going.

So Nora could not appeal to him or to the few women friends she had, whose minds turned to their own griefs, whenever she mentioned her sorrow, saying, "It was such a way that little Jannie died," or "Mary was a fine grown girl when the fever took her," and proceed with long stories of their troubles that only ended with the withdrawal of the listener.

Daniel coming upon her in the midst of the pursuit of his entrancing mistress, Art, would sigh, and find her the only rest for this restless love he had for her rival. Here, at least, there was not uneasiness, lest the face should disappear while he gazed upon it, or the desired presence fade, leaving his eyes hungry and his heart full of helplessness. He was so sure of Nora. They were bound for life—for life, nothing could part them. Loving her over all, sure of her above anything, he was content to know she was there; and knowing this, lifted his whole soul, mind, and thoughts to that most

cruel other whose garment he fancied he touched.

But Nora, a woman, was hardly content to know she was beloved. She chose to fancy now and again, with her wish for some of the old expression of sentiment and romance, that she was being neglected and forgotten. The loss of her child, giving her newer and deeper feelings, made her long for more return from others to her affectionate advances. She was not a woman to stand alone, to shut up her feelings in the casket of her heart and go on as if nothing had happened. She desired love always, and, above all, sympathetic companionship.

A few days after she rose from her bed she discovered the meaning of being alone. The agony that had been useless, the new love that had been born with her child, and now went beating like a bird bereft of its young in her heart, were to be known to her alone.

She rose, looking round her little world, expecting it to rush to her and fall at her feet, hail her as queen of sorrows—and there was no world there. All she met with had

their own troubles, and had forgotten hers; and Daniel, seeing her on her feet, beamed, forgetting why she had lain at all.

"Down again, dear? I am glad to see you your own self again."

Her own self. Nora, the girl, had gone into the grave with her little son. She smiled sadly upon him across the little mound he did not see, and he went to the drudgery of his office with almost a light heart.

"I must ask someone up to cheer her," he said; "she must be lonely." He looked back at the little figure at the door, the only elegant thing in view; and going to the office, he sat for the day on his stool, his heart buried amongst the papers, and his soul upon the peaks.

CHAPTER XII.

The lover in the husband may be lost.—LORD LYTTLETON'S "ADVICE TO A LADY."

SHORTLY after this Daniel brought his friend, Mr. Wendover, up to see Nora. He brought him out to dinner without mentioning it first to his wife; and when he cheerfully told her that his friend was in the little drawing-room, Nora, tidying her curls at the glass, unexpectedly dissolved into tears.

"What have I done now?" he said aghast. "I thought it would cheer you up to see him."

Nora broke into a small tempest.

"Cheer me up!" she laughed bitterly. "To have a man to dinner when there's no dinner, and no servant to serve it!"

"Oh! that does not matter," Daniel said, with masculine belief that a woman can produce a dinner with as little in hand and with as much ease as the miracle of the

loaves and fishes. "Any little thing will do; he is not particular. A bit of chicken or a chop."

"Do you know what we have in the house?" said Nora desperately. "A hash—a hash of yesterday's cold mutton." She wept afresh.

"My dear girl, I *am* sorry. I wouldn't have asked him, only I thought it would do you good to see friends sometimes; he was longing to meet you, so I just said, 'Well, come along and dine with us.'"

"We don't dine," murmured Nora, between her sobs; "we sup."

"Well, surely something can be done," Daniel said, a little impatiently. Then, looking at her doubtfully, he added, "Couldn't you put something fluffy on? You look a bit dowdy in that old dress."

Then Nora's eyes grew hot, and her tears dried suddenly.

"Men are always expecting impossibilities," she said crossly. "If you travel with them, they won't let you bring more than a handbag; but they expect you to turn out of that a complete outfit for every emergency

of travel—an evening dress, a walking costume, and all the rest, and when they have a small house and no cook they ask crowds of people to dinner and expect an elaborate menu out of an empty cupboard."

"I think you exaggerate a little," said Daniel as he moved to the door. "You are——"

But Nora ended any further discussion by a sudden change of mood.

"After all, what does it matter? If it's good enough for you, it's good enough for him." She kissed her husband softly, and his sky was all clear again.

"Of course, Nora can manage something," he thought. For a moment he had begun to fear for his table, when Nora, with a frown, laid the cupboard bare to him; but now she smiled he went whistling downstairs, feeling it would be all right; she would manage somehow.

Under circumstances in which a woman would have sat in an agony of apprehension, Daniel lolled in his armchair, lazily chattering to his friend; and when Nora at length appeared, attired in her Kilburn blouse, her

face delicious with roses and mischief, he was not the least surprised to find himself seated to soup and a dainty curry, followed by chicken salad, tipsy cake, egg savoury, and coffee. The only thing he wondered at was that the dinner should have taken so long to get ready; it was nearly an hour late.

"Of course, I knew you could manage some little thing," he whispered to Nora as she left them to their cigars—cigars that Daniel had always by him to smoke in the evenings, for a man must be poor indeed when he cuts off his own tobacco. In the cutting down of household expenses it comes last; and Daniel still saw his dreams curl upward with the smoke, and dreamt in the comforting oblivion of his cigar.

But Nora, running to the kitchen, where Miss Mathews stood nervously awaiting her, flung herself upon her with a storm of kisses.

"You are a darling," she cried. "It went off splendidly. He ate everything, even the curry. Wasn't it well you had the cold chicken and the eggs? I never would have thought of it all, but I would sooner have served it myself and said we had no

servant. You made me feel so mean, seeing you coming in and out without a word. Oh! it was mean, not to have said you were not——"

"I would never have gone into the room otherwise," said Miss Mathews; "I hoped that Mr. Daniel would not know me. I don't believe that I have ever spoken to him, though I have been here so often."

"No, he did not even see who was serving, and he was not a bit surprised at the dinner," laughed Nora, "though I told him we had only hash! Men are queer things. I once knew a man whose wife used to appear in a new gown every week for her 'At Home' day, and all he would say was, 'Well, dear, that gown is very becoming,' or 'I don't think it is quite as nice as the one you had on last, and you ought to get something more fluffy and shining, or whatever you call it,' and when at last an enormous bill came in for all the things he made a fearful row, and published a notice in the papers that he would not be responsible for his wife's debts."

"Where did he think she was getting the beautiful clothes?" said Miss Mathews.

"Men accept a lot without thinking, where a woman is concerned," said Nora. "Now if I gave Daniel a five-course dinner, with the rarest delicacies, and dressed in a new blouse every night, he would not be in the least surprised, as long as I did not send in the bill. He would accept as a matter of course. The only thing that he would be surprised at would be my wearing shabby things," she added, a trifle sadly.

"He likes you to look your nicest; he is so proud of you," said Miss Mathews absently; her mind was evidently upon something else.

"But the tipsy cake crowned all," laughed Nora, her thoughts still on the ordeal of the dinner. "It was lucky you should have had those sponge cakes."

Miss Mathews flushed a sudden red, and Nora saw it. "Now, why on earth should she blush at sponge cakes?" she thought.

"Those sponge cakes were our salvation," she said, watching Miss Mathews suspiciously. Yes, it was the sponge cakes,

she decided. What was the secret of those cakes? The old lady grew pale now at their mention, and hurried into her bonnet and shawl.

"I really must go, dear," she said, anxiously. "It's important I should go at once—at least, I mean I must go now——"

Nora, seated upon the edge of the table, looked at her calmly, as if she were a fish struggling at the end of a line.

"Now I come to think of it," she said slowly, "you have been behaving very queerly to-night. Your air throughout this terrible evening, even in the midst of our heroic struggles, has been distraught and strange. Your thoughts have not been under my roof, but far away in the regions of sponge cakes."

"I really must go, dear," said Miss Mathews, edging to the door. "I am so sorry I cannot stay to help you further, but just now I cannot." She spoke pleadingly, as if excusing her unkindness, and a little pitifully, as if to ask that she might be let go without further teasing. Nora jumped from the table to embrace her. She was all a child

to-night, with the novelty and excitement of having a guest.

"Of course, you must go if you want to. You are a darling, and I am so much obliged to you for your saving hand. If I had not thought of you I would surely have drowned myself in my dish of hashed mutton. You are a brick."

She held the door open, watching the little figure hurrying away, evidently in great haste, down the street.

"There *is* something strange about her to-night," she thought. "I wonder what is the matter?"

CHAPTER XIII.

Slight not what's near through aiming at what's far.—EURIPIDES.

"I WONDER was he bored to death?" was Nora's first question to her husband next morning.

"I don't think so," Daniel laughed. "He told me he had seldom enjoyed an evening so much. He said you were very sweet." And Daniel kissed her with the pride of possession. "He wants to come again very soon."

"Oh!" said Nora, rather blankly, as another dinner presented itself to her mind. "Does he?"

"Don't you like him?" Daniel inquired.

"Oh, yes, of course, although I really did not pay much attention to him. I was so scared about the dinner."

"Silly child!" said Daniel. "I told

you not to bother. I knew it would come out all right."

Nora laughed. "Oh, you men," she said; "by the way, talking of the dinner, there was something very funny about Miss Mathews last night. I am just going straight over to see her the minute you are gone to your studio."

Daniel winced. He stared at her a minute sternly. Was it possible she had forgotten or never realised what he had given up for her? Was it possible she still thought he spent those hours away from her in his old beloved room, painting, instead of in that hateful office, where his heart was breaking? Did she never think of that painting lying upstairs, with its face to the wall, waiting until he had time and money to return and finish it? He kissed her coldly, and left, his mind full of grievance against her.

"She has no sympathy with me at all," he thought. "She has not shown the slightest interest in what I am doing in town. I suppose she thinks my sketches are selling in great quantities. Not that she really

believes I am clever enough to sketch selling articles; but she just accepts the fact that we have now enough to live on without thinking how. She just thinks, with all women, that men can get money somehow, that their pockets are always half full, and that when we deny them anything, it's only our meanness." He drew a cigar from his pocket and lit it. "I'll begin pipes to-morrow," he said apologetically to himself. "I can't afford cigars. I shall buy some fruit for that picture and call it, 'The Fruit Seller.' I think it's going to be a success. I'm sure I could make it so if I had only time. To-morrow," he muttered, "I shall get up at five and have a couple of hours' work before I leave home."

He looked at the men who hurried with him towards the City. "Do they all hate it as I do?" he thought. "And why do we all do it, if so? Goodness knows, we came into this world with little enough, and we go out of it with as little, yet all the time we are here we slave, slave, slave, the rich with the poor, few of us doing what we wish to do. I only want simple food to maintain me

alive, a place to sleep in, a garment to keep me warm—that's all on this earth. And let me have the daylight for my own. I don't care how bare the world is if I only have one room in it that I can paint in."

He saw the doors of the little houses open as he passed, one and then another. At nearly every opening he caught glimpses of women and sometimes children bidding their husbands and fathers good-bye for the day.

"It's you," he thought bitterly, "you women that drag us away from our real lives. Your wants, your comforts, your extravagances. A married man no longer can live his own life; he must struggle to make money for a woman, and she is never satisfied. No sooner has she got good dresses and a comfortable home than she wants better, and when he struggles for that, then better still, and so on. He never can say, 'Now comes the time I may follow my own desires.'"

After this tirade against women Daniel smoked, satisfied. Now that he had for the moment convinced himself it was woman's—Nora's—fault that he had not

succeeded, he felt better. No; he was not a failure. He had not had his chance. He had been knocked out by Fate so far. Fate had been in opposition to him from the first, but he had struggled against it, and nearly conquered, when his marriage had flung him back. He was a clerk again—he who had fought so hard against that very life not many years ago, and all because he was married, wedded to a girl who did not even realise what he had sacrificed for her.

All this time, Nora, unconscious of his bitterness to her, was going through her little house uncomplainingly, singing as she dusted and set things straight. Only once did she grow silent, as she opened the door of the room which Daniel kept for his paints and pictures. This was the place she had intended for her nursery. Two big tears stole down her cheeks as she looked; she seldom came to the room since she had moved out after her illness: she had been so full of her own grief that she had looked on without realising when Daniel had brought his pictures home, and asked if she would let him have the room.

She had taken out the little box that held so many tiny unworn clothes; she had put away the knitted shoes and the woolly lamb that Miss Mathews had given her—how she had laughed when the woolly lamb came! "It's so old a toy for baby; he will have to wait till he grows older," she had said, in the superiority of her motherhood, when Miss Mathews tried to force the wandering, unseeing eyes upon it. "He never grew old enough," she whispered now, as she thought of the dead little one; and her eyes went around the room, unconscious of the picture lying before her eyes, and only seeing what was not there to another's gaze, her lost darling, in his cradle by the fireside, and the strewn toys waiting for his hand. She dusted the room, languidly trying to turn away her sad thoughts. Then, as she came upon it, she looked at Daniel's picture with wifely admiration. "It's a pity he does not finish it," she said. "I'm afraid he gets tired of things very soon."

A loud knock at the door made her hurry down to open it. A dishevelled creature met her gaze, half naked and more than

half drunk. She confronted Nora with the astonishing words, "I warnt my baby!"

Not ten minutes ago the words had been upon her own lips that were now upon the impure mouth before her.

"'Ave you seen my baby? I've lost my baby?"

Nora banged the door in the creature's face as the woman tried to put a foot into the house. She stood in the hall a minute listening to the storm of curses going on outside.

"I'll 'ave the law of them as took my child," and then she heard the creature fall into drunken sobs and depart.

"Now why under goodness should she come to me?" Nora said. She hurried into her hat and jacket, and went down the road to see Miss Mathews. She knocked three times before she could get an answer, and then Miss Mathews had the chain upon the door.

"It's only me," said Nora, ungrammatically, laughing. "Were you afraid of that awful creature who was yelling down the

street ? She came to me for her baby. What does it mean ? "

Miss Mathews had tremblingly let her in. Nora could see that she was deadly pale, and seemed to be listening even while she was speaking.

" I suppose someone has taken it," she muttered ; " she is a terrible woman."

Nora laughed. " Who would take such a woman's child ? That is Mrs. Smith, who lives right at the end of the road. She is always drunk, and the poor child has probably been forgotten in some public-house. But she has gone now. Won't you come out ? I have some shopping to do ? "

" I can't to-day," Miss Mathews said in such a manner that Nora looked at her suspiciously. She was a little hurt at being thus sharply refused, but Miss Mathews did not mean to refuse her so abruptly ; in truth, she was confused and upset by some secret of her own and she did not quite know what she was saying. She followed Nora with tears in her eyes to the door.

" Don't be angry," she said, " my dear ; but, really, I am very busy to-day."

Nora kissed her, laughing. "Why, of course, it's all right," she said gaily. "Some other day will do as well." She went her way, still full of wonder, for there was something exceedingly strange about Miss Mathews since last night.

The mystery solved itself very soon. Daniel, in fact, read it out from the evening papers. A woman had been arrested for stealing a child. She said she thought it had been neglected by its parents, that it was hungry and half-clad, that she had found it crying in an empty house while the mother was away drinking. She thought it was a woman's place to protect it. The court told her it was a case for the law, not a private individual. They dismissed her with a warning not to do it again. The woman was Miss Mathews.

"And she had it in the house that night we had Mr. Wendover," said Nora, amazed. She started to her feet, and put on her hat. "I must run over to her, poor thing. I think I understand."

Miss Mathews was no longer full of mystery when Nora came to her. All

the anger of her gentle nature was roused.

"That creature," she cried, "she doesn't care a straw for the child; it was dirty, unfed, half naked, when I took it. But I washed it till its golden hair shone and curled about my fingers, and I fed it so it looked like a lovely babe as God sent it, not an unclean thing that one had to guess was a child at all." She suddenly sat down, laying her grey head on her hands. "When they gave it to its mother it screamed and turned to me, holding out its little pink hands. It chose its mother then—it chose her, I say. I want my son. I am so hungry for my son."

Nora laid her hand softly on the grey head, and thought of the child she had held but a short time against her heart, so warm, so sweet, so beautiful, he whom she called her very own then, now, and for ever hereafter. She felt a sad pride glow within her, as she sat by the poor spinster. "Mine is the lesser grief," she said, as the other broke into an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

CHAPTER XIV.

What does it all mean: poet?—BROWNING.

To Nora's surprise William Wendover came frequently to their little house after his first visit. Obviously, his calls were paid to Daniel, whom he professed to talk business with, though Daniel could never see where any good came of his efforts in that direction. He, however, felt encouraged by his friend's evident admiration of his art work, and his cheery words kept him from utter despair in that direction.

"Don't give it up," Wendover would plead, when Daniel would throw his brush aside saying it was all of no use; that he might as well settle down as a clerk for the rest of his life. "You must abandon that desk and take to your painting again." But this Daniel knew was impossible. Indeed, he felt the hateful drudgery was drawing its coils more

tightly round him. One night he came home with the news that a higher post had been offered to him, and would be his in a few months if he cared to accept it.

"It will mean more pay, of course," he said to Nora, "and we shall be able to get more things." He was thinking of his picture. Perhaps he could have a model for an hour in the mornings, he thought with a lightening heart. But Nora, not knowing his mind, clapped her hands gaily.

"Then we can have a servant," she said, and seeing his face fall, felt aggrieved.

"It's really very hard on me," she said pleadingly. "Look how my hands are getting spoiled." He did look, and saw that they were pretty little hands, not very strong or very capable, hardly a woman's hands yet; and on one was his wedding ring. He took them in his, and kissed the little palms; he felt them rough upon his lips.

"My poor Nora," he said, "I will not let you spoil your white hands any more," and so Nora was to have her servant, and Daniel with his higher post would be no better off than before. He grew more

bitter as time went on, and he saw no chance of any change. He would often on his return home shut himself up with his picture, and refuse to let Nora or Wendover enter.

"Sit with Nora," he would say as he closed the door. "Keep the poor child company. I am a bear to-night."

Then he would draw the curtain from before his painting. "Oh, if I had only the opportunity to finish you, I would have success." He would forget his limitations and his former failings, and fancy it was only because he had not time that he could not do a masterpiece. He refused to see that there were any faults in the painting before him. It only wanted a model to add the little finish he was prepared to give it.

"I'm alive when I hold you in my hands," he said to his brushes; "I am dead in that office, and it seems I could succeed there if I liked." He would walk up and down the room like a madman, waving his paint-clogged brushes in the air, afraid to touch the canvas with them, the light was so bad.

Meanwhile, Wendover, whose shallow,

sentimental nature had been drawn by Nora's pretty face and unaffected manner, would be keeping her company downstairs, reading her columns of romantic poetry in a melancholy voice, and giving her much flattering homage. Nora innocently accepted it as a woman's right from man, that which she had always received from any of the youths whom she had met in her girlhood—the admiration a pretty woman can always command.

"Oh, all men are like that to women," she replied when Miss Mathews said something about Wendover's admiration. "I mean," she said, seeing her remark sounded vain, "men's attitude to woman is always kind and silly; they always talk as if women could only understand them when they are flattering them, and talking nonsense, which neither believe for a moment. They like to imagine that they believe we are superior beings; they think it gives us something to live up to."

Miss Mathews, who had no experience of the other sex, was quite willing to take Nora's word about them. Nora who, up to

the present, had passed through life more or less like a butterfly, sipping whatever sweets came in her way, and avoiding the shadows, considered herself quite capable of giving a just judgment upon the matter. Her father's failings did not impress her very deeply, for youth can always shake away the disagreeable things and find something to smile upon. So Miss Mathews was silenced, though she in her heart rebelled at Daniel being alone upstairs, while Nora entertained Wendover in the drawing-room. To mention this made Nora angry; she would devote herself more thoroughly to Wendover's entertainment when Miss Mathews grumbled. For Daniel had spoken sharply and refused to come down when she had wearied for his company and grown bored with Wendover.

None noticed, not even Wendover himself would admit to his own heart, that he was doing his best to make havoc in the little home. He dawdled his idle hours away with Nora, falling more deeply in love with her every time he read his pages to her listening ear. She was such a good listener, he thought, and he did not know that half

the time she started his muse a-trotting she did it but to let her own thoughts have free rein, where she might quarrel and make up in her fancy to her heart's content with her cruel Daniel. Sometimes Daniel would repent and come down from his room to share their company; but his gloom was such, and his conversation so monosyllabic, that Nora could not help comparing the two, and would turn to Wendover to keep up the conversation.

After a time it began to dawn upon Nora that she was one of those objects of pity, a neglected wife. The little rift that had at times threatened the harmony of their lives became a real thing, and, what was more, was now rapidly becoming wider. Something told Nora that she was not treated properly, that she was worth considering and that she was not considered; that she was, in fact, becoming nothing to her husband. When this thought first came to her Nora shuddered and braced herself up. For a few weeks she pursued Daniel with feverish affection, making daily demands on his love, and requesting constant demonstrations of it

to prove it was still alive. If he seemed cold she reproached him for not caring for her any longer; if he was like his old self she said he was only putting it on to deceive her.

And why this was happening none of them could have said. Not Daniel, worried, disappointed with his work, and thinking almost altogether of that now; not Nora, who spent her days in discontent; not even Wendover, who now wholly believed the poisonous insinuations he was dropping into Nora's ears.

"Married people," he would say in his melancholy tones, "are the really unfortunate people of the world"; and then, at Nora's unbelieving laugh, "I shall tell you why: because there is no possibility of release from their boredom."

"But they need not necessarily be bored," said Nora.

"They always are," Wendover murmured, looking dreamily at her till the slow red ran through her cheek under his gaze. "They sometimes do not know it. The good, pious people never do; but still, looking

every day at the same face, growing withered with the years, listening always to the same voice, growing untuneful with age, they are bored, bored with the sameness, with the peculiarities, the tricks and temper of the one or of the other; how they grow to hate the very traits of manner or conversation that once attracted them by repetition! Lucille's pretty way of flashing a side glance, how absurd in old eyes. Claude's masterful way of tapping with his fingers to keep the attention, attractive once when there were new things to hear, how irritating to the nerves now, when all was said; how wearing to have to listen to platitudes or repetitions! How sick they are of one another, poor couple! But they are too good, too pious, to admit it even to themselves. They think they are worried and angry at other things, when they are only bored one with the other."

"Nonsense!" said Nora crossly, a little fear pulling at her heart. Was Daniel, then, wearying of her little tiresome ways? "People grow to love more dearly as time passes. That's what marriage is for, 'till

death do us part.' I know lots of old people who cling together with as much love as ever young folks have."

"Use, Mrs. Macdermot, use; that's what you mistake for love. They have become used to each other, as I would think I should fall if I had not this stick to lean on"—he held an ivory-handled stick in his long, thin hand—"for I have had it for years, and every morning my hands reach for it without my command; it guides my feet down dark places. I am used to it; I would miss it if I lost it."

"There was once a boy," chimed in Nora flippantly, "who always touched a button on his coat in school when he was questioned by the master. One day a schoolfellow cut off the button, so the boy, finding his fingers without their usual mark, became flustered and lost his place. Is the wife like that button?"

Wendover smiled. "And the schoolboy did not love the button, he was used to it; but when it was gone he got another sewn on in its place, so missed it no more after the first moment."

"I refuse to admit," Nora said unhappily, "that we change so quickly. When one is married one doesn't think of the possibility, or want to."

"That is what I say," Wendover agreed. "They dare not think—the pious ones; but if they were only engaged for half the time they are married, do you imagine but there would be plenty of broken promises with the weariness of years? What hastens marriage? Why, the fear of one losing the other, the fear that one may change."

"You do not know," said Nora softly, half to herself. "Marriage is a comradeship, a deep and lovely friendship."

Wendover grew pale; his eyes, fixed upon her, were angry. He was jealous that he had not the power to bring this little girl to his feet, in all-round admiration of his person and his ideas. She still clung to her provincial thoughts of love and marriage in spite of his arguments. Besides, how dare she think of another man, and he with all his allurements before her! He longed to lay his long, thin hands upon her pretty shoulders

and shake her. Instead, he leaned back sadly, heaving a heavy sigh.

"The world was meant for change. Marriage was never one of the original laws of Nature. The old earth, mother of us all, is a fickle jade, and her blood is in us, otherwise we should lay ourselves upon her breast and die. The husband, rising from the cold clay that lies above the heart that loved him, finds another face to worship, and bears a woman to his home in the place of her he lost. The mother, smiling upon her living children, truly forgets those that are dead; the youth scorned by his sweetheart, puts her ring upon another hand; thus we are able to endure life because we are allowed to change."

Wendover leaned suddenly forward to where she sat in the shadow. "Will you listen," he said, "to this little song I made about a neglected flower?"

Nora nodded. He could see the glint of her pretty hair as she moved in the dim light, her girlish figure bent a little towards him from the darkness where she sat to listen. His voice trembled on his verses

as he half spoke, half sung them, in his soft tenor voice :—

"Once a boy the flower of love
Saw in his neighbour's garden ;
He said, 'Thou art too fair a bloom
To have a careless warden.

"'Ah ! would it were my joyous right
To own so sweet a duty,
Thy frozen petals 'neath my kiss
Would break to golden beauty.

"'And shall I leave thee die forlorn
To know no summer weather,
Or pluck thee from thy desert spot,
To live and love together ?

"'Ah ! come to me, thy place is here,
Thy fragrance let me cherish,
Or in the winter of thy home
Thy tender bloom must perish.'

"Then through the sharp dividing hedge
She bent without regretting,
He planted her within his heart,
Where there was no forgetting."

When he had finished there was a silence ; his eyes strove to find her face in the gloom. Surely she would understand, this poor little neglected flower.

"What are you thinking of?" he murmured tenderly. "Was the boy not right to take what no other wanted? Tell me, what do you think?"

But Nora was not disposed to be sentimental. "I was thinking there was more of that poem," she said lightly. "Yes, now I remember:

"'Alas, the neighbour's careless eye
Did soon the theft discover;
He loosed his dagger in its sheath,
And sought the faithful lover.

"'Said he, "I'll cut my stolen flower
From its unhallowed growing."
He struck the youth unto the heart,
And set death's river flowing.'"

"I did not know you read my verses, Mrs. Macdermot," Wendover said, sitting back in his chair, half sullen at her coldness, half flattered by her knowledge of his works.

"Yes, I have read them," Nora said quietly. There was something in her tone that Wendover did not like. It chilled his sentimental ardour. What did she mean? Surely she would not dare to snub him—but that was impossible. He wondered what drew him

to this pretty, yet thoroughly commonplace, young woman; and as he wondered he saw the glitter of her young eyes in the firelight, the turn of her soft cheek, the moving lights and shadows of her hair, the quick rise and fall of her bosom. It was youth and its clear soul that called him, smirched and weary as he was, from the world that could give him no new surprises.

The innocence that looked and listened to him, and yet could not understand him, that, too, roused his sense of humour and kept him amused. Was she as innocent as she seemed? Surely he had from someone heard of something in her past. The story had not interested him at the time as much as had the beautiful teller of it, so he had forgotten. But now he knew it was a tale of this young artist and this girl—he remembered the name. Yes, the pretty lady who had told it to him had sat for her portrait to Macdermot. Whatever the story was, it was enough to encourage him not to give up the chase. This little prude was not without a past, whatever those innocent eyes might say. How

far could he go before she would see what he was—what his desire was? How would she receive him when she did? This little excitement gave him more enjoyment than he had had for many a long day. And through it all was an eagerness new to him, a longing to get the love of this woman whose heart he felt was still unawakened. What was her affection for her husband—only a little flame, which he himself would blow upon and extinguish.

"Death," he said, "would be nothing if one had the flower in one's heart."

He leaned towards Nora, wondering how much he dare say. Her hand was hanging over the side of her chair, white and slim, almost touching him. He wanted to take it in his.

"You women," he continued, as she sat in silence, "you are not capable of a great passion. No; you would not face death or dishonour for love. You are like the soft, pretty cats that follow comfort, and dislike to be disturbed in your body or soul."

Nora laughed.

"Yes, you laugh," he murmured; "but

you do not answer. Is it not so, that you cannot love ? "

He lifted his hand as he leaned for the answer, and, as if unwittingly, dropped it beside hers so that it touched her fingers in a half-caress. Nora's face in the shadow got a hot red ; she moved uncomfortably. She lifted her fingers from beside his, and, changing her position, clasped both her hands behind her head. In doing so, her pretty soft figure became more distinct in the firelight ; an added dangerous gleam seemed to flash from his dark eyes. He felt his heart beating quick, and unbidden words rising to his lips.

" Answer," he whispered, and then the unwelcome creak of the door opening froze him to silence.

Daniel came in cheerful and more like his old self than Nora had seen him for some time. She forgot the little thrill of fear that Wendover had given her in looking at the bright face of her husband.

He struck a match and lit the lamp upon the table. " You people sitting in the dark, talking poetry, I'll be bound."

"Mr. Wendover kindly recited to me one of his poems," Nora said, rising and laying her hand on Daniel's shoulder. She stood smiling and looking at him as he turned to the poet.

"To-morrow," he said, "I shall take that masterpiece down to you, and if your friend says there is talent enough in it for me to go on, on I go; but if he says 'No, give it up, my boy, you are no good for anything save the desk,' then I become a clerk on a high stool for the rest of my life, and you, Nora, instead of being the wife of a great painter, actually knighted for his genius, Sir Daniel, will be now and for ever plain Mrs. Macdermot."

"Not 'plain,'" said Wendover, trying to attract her attention, "at all events."

"No, never plain," Daniel took her hand in his, and, raising it to his lips, kissed it fondly, thus taking the compliment and using it to his own advantage. Nora was delighted at his affection. She turned her shoulder to her guest, and was all attention for her husband's next advance.

Wendover rose hastily, jealous and angry.

He bid Nora good-bye coldly, gruffly calling to Daniel not to be late in the morning. When he was gone Nora turned to her husband.

"I hope he won't come again," she said, seating herself by the hearth and stirring up the dull cinders.

"Why? Don't you like him?" Daniel said, rather irritably. "He is a very good friend to me, and he seems a very pleasant fellow."

"Well, I don't see what he has done for you," Nora answered, bending over the fire.

"He has done a lot. He is the only friend I have in London. He has tried to help my art on in every way, and to-morrow he has asked Sir Oswald Ward, the great painter, to his rooms. There I am going to show him my picture, in order that he may decide whether it's worth my trying further. If I have no talent I had better stop wasting canvases."

"Of course you have talent." Nora spoke as if she had never doubted it. Neither did Daniel at that good moment. He was sure there was something in his picture, after all. Had he not left it upstairs without one glance

of disgust. It pleased him more every time he saw it. Never before had such a thing happened; always had he been disappointed in his work, but to-night he could find no fault. Like a woman who hangs over her firstborn, almost afraid her touch might harm him, so had Daniel hovered about his canvas, brush in hand, frightened for fear a stroke might spoil its perfection, yet afraid to leave anything undone that might add to it. Surely it was a masterpiece.

"I don't like him, anyway." Nora's complaint brought him back to earth. "Do not let us have him here again."

Daniel was angry. "Don't get silly dislikes to people for nothing," he grumbled. "What has he done or said to annoy you?"

"Nothing, but I don't like him." Nora turned a blushing face from her husband. "I don't like him at all."

"You are very unreasonable," Daniel said, rising, "and very unkind. The one friend I have who will help me you want to get rid of. And for nothing, as you say, except perhaps that I like him." Daniel

knew this was an unjust remark, and was not surprised at Nora's outburst of indignation.

"You know that is not so. How can you say such a thing?"

"Why, then, do you not want him to come?"

"Well, let him," Nora consented wearily. How could she explain her vague uneasiness in the presence of this Wendover? How foolish if it were only his manner with women, if he meant nothing.

"He has been good to me," said Daniel. "It's not his fault if he cannot make something of me; it is my own." He spoke sadly, and Nora, running to his side, put her soft arms about his neck, and from that safe haven abused the world at large which refused to recognise her Daniel as the greatest and noblest painter who had ever lived.

And so the little rift was mended for the time.

CHAPTER XV.

The firste vertue, sone, if thou wilt lere,
Is to restreine and kepen wel thy tonge.

CHAUCER.

THE next morning Daniel departed in nothing less than a cab from his humble door. This was a great occasion for the public in the little street. Seldom was a cab seen down that way. But Daniel, with his big canvas, drove off, unaware of any eyes upon him, save those blue ones of his wife, so full of affection, watching him from his door.

It was dark when the cab returned in the evening, bringing the canvas back; and when Nora opened the door at the sound of wheels, and went out on the step to meet her husband, it was Wendover who first alighted from the cab.

"Mrs. Macdermot," he said cheerfully, rubbing his hands, "I am so cold." He looked through the open door into the

little drawing-room, where a cheerful fire burned. Nora turned back hospitably. She had been wanting to meet Daniel, who was lifting his painting from the cab.

"Oh, come in," she said, and Wendover took his overcoat off, remarking he must not stop. "Let the cab wait," he called to Daniel, "as I shall be going soon."

Nora had gone into the drawing-room to poke the fire and turn up the dim lamp. "Come in and get warm," she smiled, her dislike of Wendover gone with his brisk good-humour.

He closed the door, and flinging himself into a chair, stretched his hands to the blaze.

"Isn't Daniel coming?" Nora said, half rising; but Wendover assured her he was following.

"He is putting his picture safely away," he answered smiling; he was glad to see this pretty woman again. There was something in the cosy room, commonplace though it was, with its roaring fire, its shaded lamp, its comfortable chairs, and, above all, this dear girl, that made for him a complete picture of what a home should be. Of course, he could

not live in such a home himself; he, unfortunately, could not give up the luxuries of his wealth, his servants, his beautiful spacious rooms, his intercourse with fashionable people. But it rested his eye, oversated with the glitter of society, and in one of his poems he had wrung the hearts of his fair readers by his longing for such a simple place. All he asked, he said, was a little house, a humble setting for the gem it held, the woman undecked by jewels, shining only in her own loveliness. Here he, coming back from his honest toil, weary and sad, might pause in the small doorway, and looking in, see the glowing fire, the red curtains drawn, the two chairs by the table, where a white cloth held a simple meal laid for two. It was his best poem, he thought, and Nora had inspired it. To-night, only a few hours ago, he had heard it sung by a friend:

"This is all I ask from the great world."

It had been sympathetically sung. Miss Overriche had let a tremble come into her voice on the last line, and so faltering ended the song.

"I never *can* sing that without a tear." She had rustled from the piano, and seated herself by the poet. "How do you ever think of the things you write? That's just my ideal of a real home too."

"If one could get free of all this!" Wendover murmured, dreamily waving his hand toward the crowded room. "Ah, if one could get away."

"Yes." Miss Overriche had lifted her lace skirt, and thrust a tiny, beaded slipper into view. "Yes, if one only could." She looked sentimentally at Wendover, but he had not seen her; he was dreaming of the eternal sadness of things.

"I can see the room when I sing," said Miss Overriche pensively, "with its cosy chair by the fire and the table ready with its evening meal. How lovely to live that simple life."

"Ah, if one could, if one could get away from this." Wendover rose; he offered his arm to Miss Overriche, and together they entered the supper room. He frowned gloomily upon the laden table.

"Shall we begin on caviare?" he sighed.

After such a supper he would dream more comfortably of that ideal home with its cosy room and simple fare; and from dreaming came the hot desire to see it again, so he had left his sentimental companion, and picking up Daniel on the way, found himself worshipping once more at the forbidden shrine.

Nora, sitting by her fire, did not dream she was posing for a picture of ideal domesticity. She heard Daniel walking up and down over her head in his room, and believing he was too wrapped up in his picture to even think of her at that moment, half hurt, turned her attention to Wendover. Indeed, jealous in her heart of the picture that took so much of her husband's time, she was murmuring remarks upon the masterpiece, of which the "horrid old thing" was not the least offensive.

"I hope that's not meant for me," Wendover's soft voice broke in upon her thoughts, "because I really am going in a few minutes." He stretched himself more comfortably in his chair.

Nora laughed.

"Of course not," she said.

"Nor for Daniel?" he teased.

"Of course not." This time her voice was angry; she would have no jokes about Daniel.

"Now, don't be cross," Wendover smiled. "I apologise for all offences, and to prove it I am going to read you a little poem, all about—well, listen." He drew out a gold-clasped pocket-book, and, lifting from it a scented paper, began to read. When he read his own poetry his tongue seemed to caress and turn the words, as one would a priceless bit of china in one's hands. Now his low voice became soft and tender; he leaned towards Nora and read:

"If you would restful be
By your own fireside,
Soft let the pulses beat
Where the hot blood has died.

"So the cold stream flows slow
Since you are old,
Passion and madness long
Slipped from your hold.

"If you would wish for peace,
Weak in your chair,
Dreaming long dreams of age,
Dreams without care,

"If in your ingleside
Rest you would seek,
Look not in Nora's eyes,
Nor hear her speak."

When Wendover stopped, Nora did not break the silence; he looked to where she sat by the fire, and saw a slow red mount into her cheek. He leaned across to her.

"Now you are angry," he said softly; but she did not answer. What was she to say? She recognised this man's impertinent attempts at flirtation. How was she to meet them? If she appeared indignant, was it not making too much of a trifle, and absurdly narrow to take offence at what probably was no more than his usual attitude towards women? It was only lately, in the last few meetings, that it had slowly dawned upon her that Wendover was really affecting an affection for her. She was indignant and a little afraid. She would not meet his eyes, lest he should know she was afraid. He, seeing her flushed and averted face, began to take heart. He was not mistaken, then, in his charms. This woman

loved him, but he would play with the pretty mouse a little longer.

"No, you are not angry." He reached his hand out to take hers, adding softly, "Nora."

But she, springing to her feet, pulled her hand away.

"I am angry—very, very angry."

He laughed at her vehemence. He had never seen her look so lovely as now in her rage—a tempest so charmingly to wreck his heart in its storm.

"Oh, but you must not run away. You know that I adore you." He held his arms out to prevent her going to the door, and with the hope she would come to him. Nora in dismay and horror made no attempt to pass him; but, lifting her hand, struck him full across the mouth. Wendover rose to his feet, and without a word, left her by the fire. He pulled on his coat, and, with his hat well over his white face, left the house, never to re-enter. The jade had insulted him!

Nora felt his anger more than if he had spoken. She was glad he was angry—glad

she had struck him—the coward, the cad! She would go now and tell Daniel, tell him that he should have listened to her before, when she had begged him not to invite Wendover to the house.

She ran up the stairs and pushed into the room where Daniel was. He was sitting before his canvas, his head between his hands, struggling in a storm of misery, fighting in the depths. The great artist had said it was no use his continuing art: he had no talent. Oh, he had said it gently, of course, quite nicely, as though he were telling him to change a tie that did not suit him, or that his waistcoat was not the proper cut. He had advised several other professions that Daniel could not possibly enter, then gone his way with a cordial grasp of the hand and a ringing good-bye.

To this poor Daniel, sitting among the ruins of his dreams, his fallen hopes, heart-sore, full of pity or thought for none save himself, came Nora, flushed and excited, hoarse with anger.

"Daniel!" she cried, and commenced walking up and down the room. "I told

you not to have that man here again, and now he has insulted me!"

The reproach in her voice reached him, and hurt his already wounded soul. Her anger troubled him, disturbing as it did his grief, without comforting it. What was she talking about? Why did she come bothering him—she whom he could not tell of his misfortune, for she had no understanding or sympathy for it? "What man?" He lifted his head impatiently. Why did she not go? He wanted no one with him just now.

"Mr. Wendover! He—he—said he cared for me! Do you hear, Daniel? He dared to make love to me! I told you not to have him here again. I told you I hated him."

"What are you talking about?" Daniel rose angrily. This new vulgar trouble drove his sadness to rage. Why couldn't people let him alone? Why had he to think for them as well as for himself? Why was she stalking up and down, accusing him—he who wanted comforting most of anyone in the world?

And Nora, venting her shame and rage in

a torrent of words, unwittingly blamed Daniel for the whole affair. He in defending himself, and being upset in other matters, spoke hastily in answer, so that in a moment the two, craving each the other's sympathy, were facing in an open quarrel.

"You must have done something to lead him on!" cried Daniel. "Men don't behave so without some encouragement."

Now this was more than Nora could bear. She stuttered with tears, "How dare you say such a thing? It was you who brought him, who encouraged him, you who left me evening after evening, while you stayed up here with your old picture. You care about nothing else!"

She had insulted his dead darling. Here he had been sitting, waking his dreams, bidding good-bye to them before he shut the coffin lid upon them for ever; breaking upon his vigil had come this angry woman, disturbing and accusing him with ugly matters. Oh, to be alone till at least his wounds were healed and his dead buried!

"Do go away," he said; "do go away."

Nora was hurt. He did not want her.

He did not care what happened to her. Here she was telling him of her shame and indignation, and he only chided her sharply and bid her go. Where was she to go to? Down stairs to sit alone in her anger?

"If I went away altogether, I suppose you wouldn't care!" she cried, indignation on her tongue, but tears at her heart. Oh, he did not love her any more. Any more? Had he ever loved her? Suddenly came to her the memory of a day long ago, when her father had brought her to Daniel's rooms, and bid the young fellow marry his daughter. She had been forced upon him. Her face grew pale, and her voice fell.

"Oh, don't be silly; do let me alone," Daniel's fretful voice interrupted her. What was Nora bothering him about? Why did women always rake up sentiment at all hours of the day? Couldn't she let him think out both their futures now that he would have to arrange differently? Or, at least, when he had his own troubles, let her leave him to them? She was his, safe enough; surely she didn't need an hourly assurance of this? He had no fear of losing her, like this other love

that was shrouded for burial; and having no fear of losing her, he would say what he liked if she annoyed him.

"I'd be glad if you went now, anyway," he said cruelly, not knowing her thoughts.

Her father had shamefully thrust her upon him. "I wish you had never married me," she said slowly. "It was a mistake." She was thinking that he had never loved her.

"Yes," said Daniel, since she would have it, "I wish I had not." This jeer he could believe true, since he did not wish her to have married a failure. Now let the quarrel finish, since this was always the end of a woman's argument, the personal note, generally thus, "You don't love me any more." Here it came in Nora's little voice:

"You don't love me, nor never did."

He wasn't going to answer that, or fall to silly sentimental twaddle, in the face of his great disappointment. He turned a cold shoulder on Nora and shrugged. He thought her dress brushed his shoulder, but it was her fingers. Then the door closed, and she was gone. Another woman would have waited her hour, understood his temper,

and got all she craved for later. But Nora, blinded with the memory of past shame, felt he was speaking not in anger, but from his heart out; he had been fooled into the marriage; she had been a drag upon him always, an expense that took from him his chances of success. She remembered and understood now what he had given up for her. He could not love her, and he had just told her he was sorry they had married.

She drew a thick, dark jacket about her, and snatching up a hat, went out into the street, foolishly and blindly running away into the night.

Daniel, left alone, sat long, forgetting her in his horror of the future that Fate seemed to be planning for him, thinking he could not go on with the office work; no, that would be too terrible. Not for his whole life! What else was there? He had no education for any other thing, no talent. He laughed bitterly. He might have realised that sooner, when his sketches failed to get a publisher. Perhaps that was Wendover's fault. A hope sprang up. Wendover was a poet, not a man of business, yet he had undertaken to do this

good turn for him, and get him to illustrate some of his poems. Perhaps it was the poems that were returned, thought Daniel smiling grimly, and with them the sketches. Wendover would not tell that. There was something he did not like about Wendover. Something Nora had told him — yes, the cad! And he had spoken cruelly to Nora just now.

Well, he would go and make it up, if she did not come to do so herself, after a bit. In the meantime he would put the canvas face to the wall. No; he would not tear it up, bad as it was. Bad! And to his eyes it looked so fine. But what use eyes that did not know talent from such work as this? After all his dreams, the joy of the brush in his fingers—was he to know that no more? Never again the clean white canvas and the pencil in his hand? He would put his things into a box so that Nora could do what she liked with the room—make it into a sewing-place if she liked. She seemed to be always sewing. Nora, where was Nora? Certainly he had been unkind to her. She had come to him angry because she had been frightened

by that cad Wendover, and he had been unkind to her, poor little girl. She had gone off in a temper now. He would go down and make it up.

Wendover was a cad! Perhaps his artist friend was not so great, after all. Doctors differ; maybe the patient would not die. Maybe the verdict was not a true one. Supposing he went on painting till luck turned. This picture was a bit faulty. He could see it now: the shadows too heavy, the lights too white, the drawing of that hand there a little out. Yes; this was not his best work. That other one he had had in his mind, with Nora as the girl at the well —Nora, where was Nora? Never had she huffed so long before. Had he not heard the door closing? Then she was off to Miss Mathews. But so late—it was eleven. She never stopped so late before: perhaps she would stay the night to vex him, or try to frighten him. Well, he would bear it, and he would not be anxious. He would have to be civil, as he wanted her to sit for his great picture. Would he have her sitting or standing? Nora had a pretty figure. Look-

ing down into the well, or with uplifted eyes? He had the picture perfectly in his mind. He would ask no help this time from Wendover, the cad. He had something to say to him if ever they met again, the false friend. Of course, Nora had known how to treat him. Poor Nora, why did she vex him by stopping out? He was horribly anxious and sorry. She was very cruel not to come. He knew now she was not in the house.

So gradually this new worry outplaced the other and absorbed him. She had gone to Miss Mathews, of course; well, let her. How unreasonable women were. He sat and sulked, forgetting his picture and the despair it had brought him. Then, he became aware of cold, the fire was nearly out, the lamp was burning badly; in fact, his body, as his mind, was beginning to want Nora. The little comforts she had supplied him with unnoticed, he now missed; the house that he had thought of as being cosy was now bare and impossible. The other trouble was nothing to this. He rose to his feet, and went down the stairs groping. The place was in darkness. He crushed his hat upon his forehead, and

went to Miss Mathews to eat humble pie. The good little lady came to the door in a tremble, a big chain across the crack to interrogate him over.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Macdermot." The chain fell with a rattle, but Miss Mathews remained in the darkness.

"Yes! Tell Nora I have come for her."

"Nora?"

"Yes." Then, in a terror, "Isn't she here?"

"No! she has not been here to-day. What do you mean?" Miss Mathews stood exposed now. A dark waterproof set off the shining bare feet. Four little curl papers stood up like horns upon her forehead. Her small eyes were open wide in amaze.

Daniel turned to go.

"She ran out in a huff," he laughed, embarrassed. "She has not gone far. She will be home by the time I return." This he was sure of, but in any case he would search the roads near by, and their hiding-places, lest she had not yet returned. He bid Miss Mathews a brief good-night, and left her gazing open-eyed and anxious. Then

he went swiftly through the silent roads, seeking for Nora. In no archway or door did he find her, nor any sign of her. Once a policeman stopped him, looking at him suspiciously.

"Are you looking for anything?"

"Yes!" Daniel began to draw on his imagination. He could not say his wife had left him. "Oh, it's a cat—a cat my wife and I were fond of."

"Well, I've seen plenty of cats to-night," the genial policeman smiled, glad to find someone to talk to, his suspicions lulled. "What was yours like?"

"The worst of it is"—Daniel paid no heed to his questions—"the worst of it is, my wife ran out after the cat, and now I can't find her. Have you seen a lady pass?"

"One passed a while back." The policeman was doubtful. "She looked like a little old woman. She went that way, all in a hurry." He pointed down the road to Daniel's door. Daniel bid him good-night. Yes; it was Nora hurrying back. He ran the rest of the way, and found a woman upon his doorstep looking through the keyhole.

"I'm here, Nora," he laughed joyously. The woman turned, and her white curl-papers shook in her agitation. It was Miss Mathews. "I came to see if Nora had come back," she whispered, and tried to creep home; but Daniel walked with her, glad to talk. "She rushed out in anger, because I was unkind. Where could she have gone?"

Miss Mathews was crying softly, and did not answer.

"She knew no one well enough to run to but you, and——" Daniel was silent. A red flush came upon his face. What a thing even to let pass through his mind. That cad! By God, no!

CHAPTER XVI.

This, this is misery! the last, the worst
That man can feel. POPE.

THEN began for Daniel such a night as he had never known before—a night of unrest, remorse, and terror. Something told him Nora had gone for ever, that she was in no hiding near at hand, meaning to return when her anger was over. What had he said to her that she flew from him with so white a face, and went so far that he could not reach her? He remembered his cruel words with shame. From room to room through the empty house he went in his unrest. The place had the loneliness of death, of sudden tragedy—of one borne forth before her time had come.

Here, beside the bed, two little shoes lying on their sides, cast off in a hurry. On the dressing-table a reel of white cotton, a pair of scissors, a thimble slipped from a

small finger. Down in the kitchen a saucepan overflowing into the fire, a tray upon the table set and ready to be carried to the dining-room, a cloth hanging by the oven door to be used for the hot handle, and from the stove a smell of burning food. In the dining-room a supper-table set for two, a vase on the sideboard filled with clear water, and by it, yet unbound, a bunch of flowers tied with ribbon. The drooping roses, dying with thirst beside the glass, attracted him. Wendover had brought these for Nora; he had seen them in his hand as they drove home. He raised the flowers to fling them on the fire, and then, in pity for their loveliness, thrust them into the vase instead. As he did so a noise disturbed him. He looked eagerly out of the window that commanded a view of the doorstep, and there he saw a woman raising her hand to the knocker. In a second he had dropped the blind and gone to the door; but even as he opened it he knew the heavy foot was not Nora's that moved to get inside, and he shut the door upon a wail of drunken weeping. He leaned against the wall in his bitter

disappointment. The sobbing changed to mirth, and as the sound passed from his door and went up the street his heart grew full of a new terror. Where was Nora in the night—his little Nora, so innocent because so pure-minded? What insults would she meet in her flight, what terror—and he not to know? No hour could he rest, for in that hour might come her deadly peril, even her hour of doom. There was no use waiting in the house; she would not come back—perhaps could not by now. He opened the door, and rushed again into the street.

All through that awful night he went, going unknown miles, remembering no direction, only seeking her always. Once in the slim shadow of a woman he thought he had found her, and leaping forward caught the white hand swinging to and fro. The girl, startled, turned and regarded him with surprise; for a moment the womanhood half-quenched within her looked pityingly at a grief she could not understand, so plainly written in the haggard face beside her. Then the eyes that had remembered an old sorrow changed, the drooping lips parted,

and as Daniel fled, her mocking laughter echoed from afar.

Once again in those dark hours he thought he had come upon her. Stopping a moment to rest, he leaned against the stone parapet of a bridge, and looking into the waters that flowed sluggishly past, he sought in them, even the while, the lost face of his wife. In these waters he knew many a suicide had ended her misery, and though his reason told him Nora would never think of this, yet his tired brain hatched every minute a more terrible thought for him to battle with. As he rested, he saw in the shadow of the wall a drooping figure creeping in the shade, going with great weariness and helplessness. Someone this that life had not done well with. He could not see the face, hidden as it was by one shaking hand; but as she came towards the water, Daniel came to her with a cry and drew her hand away.

"My dear," he said, "my dear!"

And then he saw her face was not the one he sought, yet one so sad, so lost to hope, that for the sake of her who was a wanderer too he would have tried to help

her, but with a cry she thrust him off and fled into her dark world alone.

Along the banks of the canal the trees that had been but black masses against the moonlit sky now began to show green. Before the early dawn the stars flickered and went out. Daniel, with shoulders bent and shuffling feet, crept like an old man in the direction of his home. Now and again he would stop with a shudder as the sound of drunken singing would come to his ear, or the loud laughter of women who went without fear in the night.

As he turned a corner, with head down and eyes cast upon the ground, too weary to seek further, his eyelids half closed with sleep, he cannoned against a man coming hastily towards him. The new-comer pushed him roughly aside, then, recognising him, stood amazed.

"Why, it's Daniel Macdermot!" he said. Daniel looked up and saw Wendover. For a moment the two men faced each other. Wendover's sullen face became slowly red, and while Daniel grew pale in his anger he saw the guilty flush on the other's cheek.

A terrible thought fell chill upon his heart: his words came with a choking gasp. "Where is my wife?"

"Your wife?" Wendover looked genuinely surprised; then the memory of Nora's blow came to him. He would revenge himself upon her and this young fool who faced him so impertinently.

"Your wife? Where should she be, but at home!" Then he smiled—an ugly, suggestive smile. And Daniel, wild in his suspicion and anger, lifted his light cane and struck the grinning face before him.

For a moment Wendover raised his stick to return the blow; then, stepping back as the sound of slow footsteps came to the corner, called loudly on the police. Daniel found himself in the grasp of the law.

"This man has assaulted me," Wendover said, pointing to his cheek, where a red line began to show.

"Now, now, what's this for?" The policeman's hand closed on Daniel's wrist.

How could he explain?

He must not mention Nora's name in this scandal. Wendover did not know

where Nora was. Of this he was now sure.

In what mad moment had he thought of such a thing as possible? He stood confused, not answering the question.

"Was it robbery, sir?" The policeman looked from Daniel's worn clothes to Wendover's faultless evening attire.

"No, I don't think so; more likely some petty spite," Wendover said calmly. He looked Daniel up and down as if he were a strange animal. But Daniel did not resent it, so thankful was he that Nora's name was kept out of it all; and he was determined to keep his lips closed, and not to speak. Wendover would have it all his own way, and take revenge for his grievance. What the grievance was Daniel suspected now, and his heart beat with a pulsing of relief. Wendover was taking revenge for Nora's scorn of him. It was his snubbed self-conceit that was taking Daniel to the police-court. It was his hurt vanity that, along with Daniel's silence, got for the latter all that revenge or money could get from the law, so that a grievous fortnight had passed when he

again was free to resume the search for Nora.

In the long days between, doubt, hope, and despair had succeeded each other in his weary mind. His fear for Nora's safety had left him; he wondered at his terrors. Nora was no fool; she had probably gone home to her mother's house, or to some friend he had forgotten. But she had left him, knowing he would be worried, cruelly and thoughtlessly; she had grown weary of him, or cared for him no longer. He bore the time of his imprisonment in a state of dulness of mind unusual to him; he almost ceased to think at all for the last week of it. He dozed and woke and ate, and spent his days with little more feeling than one of the lower animals. His tired brain, wearied by worry and want of sleep, refused to act, and when he crept out at last he felt he was going home after a long illness, a fever that had brought him nightmare and weakness.

So sure was he that Nora would be there before him that he started with a cry, on coming to the house, to see inside the door the hall strewn with papers and letters, litter that had

never been picked up since the postman had thrown it through the box. He lifted the letters eagerly and looked through them, but there was none from Nora. His heart contracted with pain and alarm. What cruelty —and yet—it was not possible that she could do this thing.

There was one from his employer, dismissing him; that, of course, was to be expected: misfortunes come all together—if that was a misfortune. Had he not always hated the work. He would get along somehow, and if not, what did it matter? There was no one in the whole world of people to care. He threw the letter aside.

There was one from his aunt's lawyers, informing him of her death, that she had bequeathed to him a sum of £300 a year; the bulk of her property had gone to charities, for she deplored her nephew's taste in a profession and a wife.

This letter, too, Daniel threw aside with a bitter smile. He had neither a profession nor a wife, and the money mattered as little as the thought of the poverty inspired by

the other letter. Since Nora was gone, nothing mattered. There was a note from a publisher actually asking for illustrations from his pencil, and praising what he had seen of Daniel's work. That note—no, that note did not give him any joy. Strange that he had ever fancied art could be a rival to his wife. Art was nothing now that she had gone from him.

He went through the house in a hopeless search, but nothing had altered since he left. A heavy dust lay over everything, like a grey web binding all, making the emptiness more complete with its assumption of possession. There by the bed the little shoes, the thimble on the dressing-table hastily slipped from a small finger; downstairs the burnt remains of something in the oven, the cloth set for two in the little dining-room, the chairs drawn up, the cinders in the cold grate unremoved.

Daniel lit the lamp, and set it in the middle of the table. He looked round as if seeking for food and fire, but was reluctant to move, and doubtful of his capacity to find either of them. He flung himself into an

armchair, and instinctively drew it up to the cold hearth. He leaned his head back with a deep sigh, and closed his eyes.

Then sleep, deep and dreamless, fell upon him, and he lay inert, without sound or movement, in the soft glow of the lamp.

CHAPTER XVII.

There's not a string attuned to mirth
But has its chord in melancholy.

HOOD.

ON the night of Nora's departure Miss Mathews had little sleep. Every minute she expected to hear a tap upon her door, a summons from her friend demanding shelter; but as the hours passed, sleep unbidden came upon her, and she dozed, sitting up in bed, waking with a start now and again to imagine she had heard a foot upon the step or a knock upon the door. In the early hours she rose unrested, and hurriedly dressed. Her trembling fingers undid the curl-papers and combed back the thin grey locks into their place. Her thin lips muttered as she drew her clothes about her. The cat, who sat upon the foot of her bed, watching her movements with fond eyes, responded between the pauses with a faint mew.

"I did not think you would do such a thing, Nora—to leave the poor fellow in such trouble, how could you?" She thrust a hairpin through the little knob of grey hair. "Oh dear! oh dear! where could you have gone? How could you leave your husband, the man you pledged yourself to for ever? But of course you have gone home to your mother—rushed away by the night train." She remembered how often Nora said she would do this if Daniel vexed her. She knew that neither of these silly, proud young people would write first, each would wait till the other apologised. "You are wrong, Nora," she continued to herself, "very wrong to leave the man you married." She fell to thinking of her own brief love story, and of how she had been left; she had had no quarrel. Had she said anything to annoy him? Ah, she could not remember—not a word of their last conversation would come to her. Perhaps she had spoken cruel or hard words, and he had taken offence. No; never could she have said anything to hurt or annoy him. If she only knew what had happened to drive him out of her

life she could better have borne those long years of silence; but not to know, that was hard.

Thus ruminating, she dressed, and having attired herself in her shabby, unfashionable garments, closed the hall door and hurried towards Macdermot's house. As she turned from her gate she became aware of an old man supporting himself upon the railings. She stopped a minute, seeing that he looked ill. His clothes were neat, but shabby, his eyes covered with a green shade. She recognised him as the crossing sweeper that usually stood at the corner opposite her window. Long years had he stood there now. At first she remembered she used to fear him, thinking he watched the house; that under the dingy shade sharp eyes were set upon her coming or going; but as time passed this image passed also, and in its place an old man, blind and feeble, stood by the crossing. Now he was ill. She stopped and asked what was the matter.

"It's a weakness, ma'am," he answered feebly; "I'm feeling very bad."

"Where is your home?" she asked anxiously.

"I'll be all right now, in a minute," he panted. "Don't be thinking of taking me to the house. If that's what you're after, I won't go."

"I wasn't thinking of the poor-house, only of your own house," said Miss Mathews, distressed. "Tell me your name, so that if you are ill I can tell your friends, or do something."

"My friends won't trouble you, nor me; but my name is William Daly, and I'm not ashamed of it either, my good woman."

William Daly! The name of that old lover of hers! Miss Mathews' pity rose warm in her heart: one of that name to faint almost on her doorstep! Agitated, she ran back and opened the door, to let the poor man come in and rest for a little. She drew him into her tiny parlour and sat him in her one armchair. Little thanks did she get from the old man, sick and cross. He wanted to be let alone. And if he did die by the roadside, what matter, since he must die somewhere. Did she object that it was by her door? How hard people were on the poor! So grumbled he while she for the sake of his

name plied him with such restoratives as she could lay hands on. In the warmth and with the food she gave him the old man slowly turned to good humour and recovery, so she would fain be rid of him and set about her business; but the old man stretched before her fire seemed little inclined to move. Suddenly he turned to her his face, bright and intelligent, and pushed the chair beside him towards her.

"Sit down and content yourself, Annie Mathews," said he.

Miss Mathews started; her face took a greyer shade; she gasped for breath.

"How do you know my name?" Then, rather indignantly, "You must not speak to me like that!"

The old man looked confused; his face resumed its wonted look of feebleness and dulness.

"How do I know it? Why, I always knew it, I suppose. And you weren't so particular as to how I spoke long ago, Annie Mathews."

Annie Mathews sat suddenly down in the chair beside the old man.

"Are you William Daly, of Dunmore?" she gasped.

"I am," said the old man, without emotion.

There was a short silence, in which Miss Mathews tried to collect herself and put things together. This her Willie! There was a pang of disappointment in her heart. Willie an old blind man—he who had been so young, so vigorous, so strong—a crossing sweeper, a beggar! She had passed him every day without knowledge for years, been almost afraid of him, flown past him; something about him had scared her, some feeling that ought to have drawn her to him and discovered him, sent her running from him. She had thought of her lover as rich and powerful, and here he was facing her, poor and forgotten.

"And I gave you a penny," she whispered piteously, "once." The old man chuckled.

"Did you now? Ay, you were mean to me, Annie Mathews. A penny, yes." He fumbled in his pockets and produced a coin. "Then this should be it, the one you gave to

me!" He laughed again. "Do you know I kept this for years, and never knew why. I would turn it in my pocket, and draw it out to spend, and always put it back. And I knew there was some reason why I was not to spend it, but could not remember." He lifted it to his face and chuckled again.

Miss Mathews' eyes filled. She knew why he had not spent her penny, even if he had forgotten. She looked distressed at his action.

"Ah, you are blind!" she said.

The old man laughed and pulled the green shade from his brow. She found herself regarded by a pair of mild blue eyes.

"Not so blind," said he, "but I can see you, Annie Mathews."

Miss Mathews raised her hands hastily to smooth her hair, and see if the bow beneath her chin was in its place. Involuntarily she did this, having learnt neatness in the years gone by to please those same eyes that now looked upon her. Though the reason was long forgotten, the habit still remained with her.

Then she flushed. What would he think

of her now, wrinkled and dull as she felt herself? Would he mind the change of the years? His eyes regarded her without surprise. She remembered that he had watched her all those days, and this was no sudden coming of sight.

"Why did you do it all?" Miss Mathews leant towards him in a sudden eagerness to know everything. "Why did you pretend to be blind, and come and stand before my door?"

Again the old man's face changed and looked troubled—he could not remember. Then, blushing and stammering, Annie Mathews asked her great question, the question that had been with her night and day for years.

"Why did you leave me, Willie? What did I do to drive you away?"

"Did I leave you, Annie Mathews?" The old face wrinkled in thought. "Ay, I remember. I left you to make my fortune," the old fellow chuckled, "to make my fortune."

"You came back once, and you treated me well. You took me up the river, drove

me in a carriage, and we lunched at an hotel. We spent a glorious day together. You treated me as though I were a queen. Don't you remember?" In her excitement she seized his arm and shook it. The old man smiled.

"Did I now?" he said. "Think of that now. Up the river and lunching there. Well! well!"

"Don't you remember anything?" Miss Mathews' voice had a little sob in its tone. "Why, you went away that night and never returned, though it almost broke my heart." How cruel was his forgetfulness, and the mystery hidden in his silence. Was there someone else who took her image from him and the memory of that sweet day?

The old man puckered his brows, and looked kindly upon her. Suddenly he slapped his knees and burst into a loud laugh. "I remember," he said; "yes, all of it now. I went away to make my fortune, but I couldn't, and I came back as empty-handed as I went, with only five pounds between me and the workhouse. But I was ashamed to tell you this, so I went to you,

and pretended I was a made man, with lots of coin, and I took you out on the river, and we had a grand day, a grand day. Yes, I remember all now."

"And afterwards?" Miss Mathews, all a-quiver, listened to the glorious story, wherein she was the heroine. The old man was chuckling with his memories, which seemed to have no place in his emotions.

"Afterwards? Well, all the money was gone, and I was ashamed to see you and tell you so, and I couldn't ask you to have a beggar. So I borrowed a broom and swept a crossing, and here I am."

"Oh, Willie!" Miss Mathews forgot the passage of the years. Her voice was young as a child's. "You stood before my door so that you could see me, and watch over me? You covered your dear eyes so that I should not know you?"

"Did I now? Think of that," the old man chuckled. "Well, well, I had forgotten, but I believe you are right."

"And are you very poor?" Miss Mathews kindly questioned. She was thinking of her little fortune, too small for two—yet Willie

must not go wanting on his way. But the old man's chuckle again rattled forth.

"I've made a bit—a nice little pile, while I stood out there. People are kind to the old and blind; but I wouldn't give up the crossing, though if I had liked I could. What I have will about see me out; and I won't want any on the other side."

Miss Mathews trembled in her pitiful joy. Of course he had stuck to his post opposite her house, even with enough to live on otherwise.

And in the main it was true. Habit had grown upon him so he could not put it aside; and in it she, too, had a part. The woman going in and out of her little house in the early years, young and pretty, growing more faded day by day, was a familiar object not to be dispensed with. In former days he had looked with despair beneath his green shade on the face of the girl he had loved; but as the years passed he had forgotten his young desires, and while he stayed, growing feeble with time at his post, he had ceased to remember why he was there. The penny she had thrown to him in her charity he had

clutched with a trembling hand, pressed to his lips, hidden close to his heart, and after a time that heart would have missed the pressure of the coin, though it had ceased to remember why it lay so near. Of a procrastinating, lethargic nature, the old man, as the young, found it easy to make for himself some little happiness and content, whatever his lot; so he had drifted through life after the brief struggle in which he was worsted. He was content now with the cosy room, the bright fire, the company that turned to him with such eagerness, so content that he turned with a chuckle, and for the second time in his life asked Annie Mathews not to drive him forth from it all.

"Why not make up for lost time, Annie Mathews?" he laughed. "I won't leave you any more."

Poor Annie Mathews. With a great pang she thought of that lost time, the years of bright eyes, rosy cheeks, shining hair, of young hearts, unwrinkled brows, of hopes and desires—all gone.

And what of love, Annie Mathews? The old man by the fire, what had he now in his

heart? Had he anything but selfish age and all its narrowness and coldness? There, where once the fire of life leaped high, were not the ashes now almost cold? Was not your image from his mind out-thrown and trampled by the foot of time?

What matter all, since Annie Mathews had much to give: all of love cherished and kept young, all of faith, all of everything save youth? And since there was none to laugh when the old heads moved close in the fire-light, that did not matter either, nor the long wasted years left behind, nor the few short ones that were to come.

One friend there was to bid them god-speed in this late betrothal, with kind, admiring eyes and the pressure of a paw on each knee: Miss Mathews' little cat purred her congratulations into ears too much engaged to hear her gentle voice.

What wonder, then, if with all this excitement Miss Mathews almost forgot her friend Nora; and when, finding the door shut and no signs of life about the house next day, hurried home with a heavy sigh to make her preparations for a visit to the country—a visit

from which she returned in a month's time no longer Annie Mathews, but with the proud title of Mrs. William Daly.

"And she skipped along like a young girl, you never saw such a sight. I nearly broke my heart laughing at the pair of them," her next-door neighbour remarked, the tears of mirth running down her cheek; but there was something of kindliness in those tears, after all.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Woman, and will you cast
For a word, quite off at last,
Me, your own, your you,——"

BROWNING.

WHEN Nora left her husband's home, full of anger and grief, she hesitated a moment in dismay as she closed the door behind her. Coming from the warmth and light of the little home, the chill night seemed to close in upon her and seek to draw her away to some horrible loneliness; she leaned against the door, her hand half lifted to knock. Then the memory of Daniel's words, the indifference of his attitude towards her, beat her back into the darkness. The street door was not the only barrier that forced her from light and comfort; it was no harder than the heart of her husband, nor did it shut her away into a greater night. Her hand slid down the polished panel, and dejectedly

she turned away. Her musing led her on till physical weariness made her realise her plight. Where was she going? What was she to do?

She stood for a moment beneath the light of a lamp to count what little money she had, and her heart sank when she found the sum under a pound. Her wandering feet had led her to Euston station, and her mind momentarily turned to her mother's home. No; she could not reach it with this little sum; neither did she desire to do so, to expose the tragedy of her marriage for her mother's sorrow or her father's wrath. Besides, some heartstring bound her to the city that held Daniel; some unspoken hope bid her wait even in her despair, saying a day must surely come when they would meet again.

Now that the night was drawing in, and her anger was dying with the hours, a fear for herself overtook her. What was she to do? Where was she to go? She must find a lodging for the night. To-morrow she could think out her future plans. She sought a house in Bloomsbury, that looked clean

and respectable, where there were lodgings to let. She took great care in choosing it amongst the many that exposed cards in their windows. She remembered stories she had heard of such places, and felt the need of discretion; but when she rang up the landlady, the woman exercised a like discretion, and would have nothing to do with her. Take a young woman in at nearly eleven o'clock, without luggage or recommendation, she neither could nor would. How was it she came so late? Why had she no luggage? There was enough in Nora's hesitation and confusion to make the woman suspicious. She had absolutely no answer ready for any of these questions. Her disappointment and anger were quelled by fear. This was a new aspect of her trouble. Where was she to go? As she turned away, the woman perhaps repented; at all events, she told Nora to go higher, where there were lodgings to let. No. 28 was not so particular as she had to be, a lone widow with her living to make.

Nora, angry at her rebuff, did not thank her as she turned to go; but she went to 28, and knocked loudly. This was one of

the houses she had passed as being impossible a few moments ago. Now she was only afraid she would be driven away into the night, and what could she do if this were so? Here, however, she was more fortunate than before: on producing a half-sovereign the landlady showed her up to a little bedroom. She was a sloppy, down-at-heel woman, but good-humoured, and evidently inclined to be kind.

"One has to be so particular nowadays," she said genially, pocketing the price of the bedroom, for which she charged beforehand for the night; "but it's none of my business whether a lady comes with or without luggage; it's none of my business, I say."

Nora, peering round the little room, gave her no answer; the broad hint passed in silence. The landlady ventured another as she lit the candles standing one at each side of the little glass.

"I say, it's not nice for a pretty young lady to be out so late alone. It's not nice, I say."

The curious old face smiled upon her, but Nora would be drawn into no confessions.

She had got her room, and her money had been paid. She could not be driven forth now, so she looked at the woman a little haughtily, and moved towards the door as if anxious to close it.

"I hope you'll sleep well," said the kindly landlady. "Everyone praises my beds. I say they are clean and comfortable—yes, clean and comfortable, I say."

When Nora had got rid of the woman, she threw herself, all dressed as she was, upon the bed. Here she rested wearily without thought, exhausted, for ten minutes. Then her mind began to work again. It wanted to tell its trouble to someone; and he who had been its confessor was now the cause of its grief. There was none to whom she could go. Indignation took the place of tears. She turned against her Daniel.

After all, he had chosen her willingly, and had appeared to love her. He was fickle and cruel thus easily to have changed; but what a man possesses, that he no longer desires, and so here she was now without a home or friends. Tears of self-pity rolled down her cheeks, but her anger dried them

as they fell. She would think of him no more since he would have none of her. She must start to-morrow and earn her own bread; it would not taste so bitter as that with which he provided her. She found some pleasure in her independence, here in the little room where walls shut her away from the street—the terrible street, that had almost drawn her into its gloomy night. What would she have done if the landlady had not taken her in, and lent her these enclosing walls to keep her safe? She vaguely knew it was not a good world for a woman to wander in alone; but, somehow, the terror of it had not struck her till this minute. She shivered on the bed, thinking of the streets.

She rose and undressed, bathing her face in the cold water, hoping it would refresh and rest her; but the idea would not leave her that she had narrowly escaped spending the night out of doors. What would she have done, wandering, afraid, through the dark hours? And to-morrow, what of to-morrow? Still, let it take care of itself. Of course, she could get something to do

very easily. The thought gave her more quiet. She began to dream of her talents. A governess? No, she did not think she could teach, her own education had not been of the best. A typist? She smiled: that she knew nothing about. An actress? Many a girl had succeeded at that.

Why not she? And when, as a bright star shining upon the stage, Daniel would come, hearing the applause, to see the great lady, he would find his Nora; and so, as she had often read, his heart would incline towards her, and sorrow come upon him for his cruelty. So she would look down upon him from her queenly height, and—while her soul called to him—would pardon him reluctantly. Thus foolishly dreaming, she closed her eyes and passed into sleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

Like ships that have gone down at sea
When heaven was all tranquillity.

MOORE.

WHEN Nora awoke, in the dim light of a London morning, she gazed about her for some moments in astonishment. What way was she lying that the window should be at the end of her bed, which was always on the right?

"How did the window come there, Daniel?" she said, with a laugh; then turning, found no Daniel. She sat up, rubbing her heavy eyes, and remembering, lay back on her pillow in tears.

But tears, if they must be, are better to end a day with than to begin in; and Nora, being of a hopeful disposition; soon brushed them away and rose to meet whatever the morning was to bring her. She hesitated outside her door for a moment, not knowing

where to go, when a voice called to her across the passage.

"Downstairs, first door to the right for breakfast." Nora saw a thin girl's face smiling at her; she liked the open brow and brave eyes.

"May I wait for you?" she said.

The girl laughed.

"Sorry; but I am not breakfasting downstairs."

Nora found no one in the little breakfast-room, except an untidy-looking maid, who glanced at her unkindly, and served her impatiently. She felt she was in disgrace for coming down so late, so ate hurriedly and left the room. She sought out the landlady, and paid her another night in advance, turning her remaining shillings over in alarm. To-day she must get something to do. Perhaps the landlady could help her. She spoke to her as she sat at her desk beside a cheerful fire.

The woman looked fat and comfortable, as though Fate had dealt softly with her, which was true. For years she sat every morning in a comfortable chair, with her

account-book before her, adding pence to pounds with keen satisfaction. She gave kind words and little mercy to the pale visitors who tapped at her door, and laid on her table the few shillings they owed, grimy coins thrust forth often to buy the last of their self-respect, or their hopes—all that made life noble.

It almost seemed that when they were no longer able to pay the rent of their room at this cheap and respectable lodging-house, that with the closing of the door they left behind their last claim to kinship with the folk who passed head-high, recognising in themselves the greatest creation of a God who had moulded Himself to their likeness. Thrust from that door, it seemed that they must lose their touch on that humanity and join the throng of outcasts who slouched at the corners of the streets or searched the gutter, with the lost dogs, for something to keep them on the world—a world upon which none seemed to recognise or desire them; where they clung with animal instincts to the love of life, or shrunk from death for God knows what reason.

"I charge as low as I can," the landlady would remark, as one after another guest disappeared, first from the breakfast table, then from dinner, and at last from the house, having spent their all on a hopeless quest that the city must somewhere desire their services.

"I can charge no less, and carry on my house decently and respectably. There's nothing as cheap as my rooms are in the neighbourhood, with such a name as my house has for respectability. Those who can't afford me must go to a doss-house. There's nothing between, I say; there's nothing between in price. Of course I'm sorry when I see them go, for I know they would not if they were not driven by necessity, but I must live. So I never give credit, not for a night. I've so little profit that I can have but little mercy, too. I can't afford to be merciful, I say. Where would I begin, and where leave off? Why, the house would be always full, and my purse empty." And now thus wisely was the landlady soliloquising as she counted her pounds when Nora knocked and entered.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Willoby," she hesitated; "but I can only pay for one night more, if I don't get something to do to-day. I wonder if you could advise me; you must have a lot of experience. Tell me what I had better try first."

The landlady looked at her pityingly.

"I hope you will find something to-day, for my terms are strict. I must keep to them, sorry as I am. They are the rules of my establishment, made by the late Mr. Willoby and kept by his widow. What do you feel you can do?"

"Oh," said Nora vaguely, "anything. I would do anything just at first. I must, you see, to start with."

"Anything!" The landlady smiled somewhat grimly. "'Anything'—that's what they all say, and it is one of the hardest things to get. Now, if it was 'something' there would be more chance. There's no use in trying to be a governess unless you have a good education, nowadays it's no good; typewriting is over-full; a secretary or servant must have a good character from her last employer. Have you any

recommendations? Have you any good recommendations, I say?"

But Nora had not. She looked bewildered under the landlady's flow of eloquence, and the woman turned the pages of her account-book with some impatience. She really did not intend to interest herself in her boarders; she had no means of helping them, and only professed sympathy to keep their goodwill, and with a weak desire of being liked and praised for her soft-heartedness.

Having told Nora all the positions she could not hope to get, she smiled a dismissing smile.

"Better go out and look around: something will surely turn up."

Nora closed the door with muttered thanks, and stood upon the steps, undecided what to do or where to go. A little troubled, but still not fearing much, because she did not yet know hunger or cold, she watched the crowd of men and women; everyone was so busy, and here she stood, uncertain amongst them, as she might hesitate on the brink of a river, afraid to thrust herself into its flood. Where would that current bring her if she

let herself go amongst these hurrying creatures, these makers of a world at once so civilised and yet so savage? These variously garbed creatures, each with his wonderful hidden brain pulsing with thought, planning out the future glories of the sphere or its disgrace, ready to come in pity at your cry and aid you, or to snatch your purse and cut your throat.

Down the street she could see a crowd of ragged men, awaiting their turn for a free meal at some charitable institution; in the centre stood a policeman, armed and alert, to protect society from its fellows. Was there anyone amongst them all who cared one whit whether the young woman who surveyed them sank or swam?

Nora slowly dropped from her post of vantage, and drifted with the rest. She had no right to be a spectator; she was one of them. She bought the *Morning Post*, and looked through its columns for something that might suit her, and spent the rest of the day answering in person the advertisements. The advertisers would have nothing to say to her. When she reached her lodgings in

the evening she was hopeless and weary. She climbed the stairs to her little room like an old woman, and shutting her door, sank into a chair. She took out her purse and emptied the remaining coins into her lap—she had only nine shillings. She heard the gong sounding for supper, and hesitated whether she should go down; but hunger was stronger than her wish to economise; it drove her to the threshold. As she lingered there a heavy foot passed her and a sigh came to her ears. She saw the girl opposite pause to unlock her door.

Nora bid her good evening, and asked if she were not coming down to supper? The thin face smiled, and the dull eyes brightened with some joke known only to herself.

"Thanks, no. I'm having what the Americans would call a chafing-dish supper to-night."

Nora looked a little wistfully after the girl. A chafing-dish supper sounded dainty and appetising. She could not see her neighbour, still with a smile of cynical humour, heating over a dim lamp her chafing-dish supper of bread and watery milk.

"Miss Joy has disappeared altogether," someone said as Nora seated herself before the soiled cloth of the supper table. Her companion sighed.

"Yes, poor thing; she is not getting on, I fear. What is there for a woman nowadays?"

Nora listened, growing more heavy-hearted as they discussed themselves and their various chances of employment, or their fears of not retaining what they had got. The lodging-house was one, indeed, where the failures gathered for their last fight against the world, willing but unskilled workers, who were fighting for their life, ready to do for little wage any honest work badly.

Nora determined to remain another night, even if it left her with only a few shillings in her purse. She would not leave till she was forced to go out into that cruel battle against starvation which the streets offered. She would eat no more dinners, but break bread in her own room, as did her neighbour upstairs. She had wasted so much on food. She spoke to none of the half-dozen diners

that sat round the table, but when the meal was over ran up to her room. She lit no candle, but hurried into bed with a deep craving to sleep and forget her troubles. She forced her worries aside as she lay down, and gave her weary body up to the luxury of rest. In pleasant drowsiness she watched the reflection of the window upon the ceiling and the shadows of the people in the street crossing and recrossing the square of light. Shadows those passers were to her, too, in truth, as she lay so safe above them, with no fear of them in her heart as she closed her eyes and slept, nor of what they would do to her to-morrow when, hungry and alone, she would go forth amongst them, unable to claim from them any kindliness for all their brotherhood.

In the early morning she rose, and stole down to look at the daily paper, that was so hard to get at a later hour, for every-one of the boarders was eager for the first glance, seeking for something good amongst the advertisements. To-day there was nothing at all suitable, only a few that wanted references, which Nora could not give. She ate a frugal breakfast, thinking she

would have no other meal that day, and then went to look for her landlady. Mrs. Willoby had just entered her parlour, clad in a loose morning gown ; she looked tired and untidy.

" Can you give me a cheaper room for to-night, Mrs. Willoby ? " Nora asked. " I could get nothing to do yesterday. Perhaps to-day something will turn up, but I cannot afford even what you charge for my bedroom any more."

" I've had such a bad night," Mrs. Willoby said, drawing her chair to the table, where an appetising breakfast was spread. " At six I had to call Mary to get me some tea, I felt so ill. I say I felt so ill."

Nora expressed her sorrow.

" I hope you will let me spend one more night here," she said, with a tremble in her voice. " Can't you let me have a cheap room for to-night ? "

Mrs. Willoby looked at her with disapproval.

" A cheap room ? I say if yours isn't cheap, what is ? What is, I say ? "

" Oh, I know, Mrs. Willoby," Nora hurried to appease her ; " but, you see, I have not enough money to pay the same price to-night."

" Well, as there's no call for the room

this morning, I will let you have it for half-price for this once; but it is a special favour, I say, and must not be repeated. In extreme cases for nice girls I sometimes give half-price, but further than that I can't go. I say I can't go." She turned away from Nora as though to dismiss her.

Nora thanked her and left her. What next could she do, she wondered?

She went out into the streets, and wandered about aimlessly, sitting eventually in a park to rest. She seemed to have got into a sort of stupor, and could no longer think of what was to become of her. Of a timid, gentle nature, she felt afraid of the rebuffs that the world would give her if she thrust herself upon it too forcibly. She began to feel hungry, and thought with calmness of her own death by starvation. Some day Daniel would learn her fate, and be a little sorry. After a time the hunger became painful. She ceased to dream, and rose from her place uneasy.

Up to now her troubles had not been genuine pain, they were only things to come. Now one of her misfortunes had

clutched her. She was really hungry, and had little money. In that sharp moment she learned the value of money and the horror of its absence. She drew a precious penny from her pocket, and bought the biggest roll of bread she could find, but it was not appetising; yet having eaten it took the pain from her, and she feverishly started in a search for something to do. She put aside her shyness, and visited shops and registry offices. She made up her mind if she could not get behind a counter to go as nursery governess, but none would have her. The most she got was a promise to think about her in a week, from a millinery shop, but a week was far off for a woman who wanted bread to-day.

So when Nora reached her lodgings, weary and hungry, she went to her room heavy-hearted. As she slowly mounted the stairs the sound of other feet went up before her as slow and as weary. Nora knew it was the white-faced girl who had the room opposite, but neither spoke to the other. Both closed their doors sharply as though to hide their sufferings away in secret.

Tired as she was, Nora could not sleep for many hours. She would have sixpence left when she departed from the boarding-house in the morning. She would either have to starve or take her pride in her pocket and go back to a man who had never desired her. It was horrible and impossible; and yet, in those first days of early married life, surely he had loved her, he was so tender and thoughtful. Was it not her own fault that had driven them apart? She began to think of her misdeeds. Yes; she had been unsympathetic. Now she could see, having lost him, what little interest she had had in his pursuits. How little she had followed his enthusiasm for his art. She forgot how reserved he had been, how he had shut himself away with his dreams, which he was of too secretive a nature to share with her.

A woman ought to let a man know that she was ready to approve his work, whatever it be; that she was glad of his success, and sorrowed for his lack of it. On the last night she had seen him, what had happened about his picture? Was it good or bad news that he had brought home? She had not even

asked. She had gone to him mad with her own anger, and stormed at him as he sat overburdened with his secret.

Now that she remembered how he had looked, she felt the news could not have been of success. As she had entered the room he was sitting with his head between his hands; his eyes, lifted so slowly, were red and hot; his hair ruffled; his brow, as she touched it in parting, burning. These were not the signs of victory. A good wife can read her husband's face as a book, used as she is to studying that countenance to please. She was a selfish one, surely, to have turned her eyes only to her own grief, so that she could no longer see his features. Yes; she could see now, when it was too late, how blind she had been, and how she had alienated whatever affection he once had for her.

Well, whatever her fault, everything was over now. She would think of it no more, and live her own life by herself. It was a terrible thing for a woman to be alone in the world; she was open to so many things that would not hurt a man. Her own weakness, her timidity, the acuteness of her nervous

system, her desire for love, for companionship, all would make her suffer more than a man in like position. And then the danger to her as a woman, the heavier cruelty that the world would show her because of her sex. All this Nora faced, tossing on her bed. How was she to go out to-morrow into that world alone? How would she survive in that torrent of humanity, all fighting for themselves? Who cared to give a weak sister a hand and draw her into safety? Well, to-morrow she must take the plunge, when something must turn up. There must be someone to help her in this great city, there was none who would let a woman starve under his eyes. Something must turn up.

There were homes and people in the service of God who surely would not be too busy at prayer to hear a cry for help. Yes, to-morrow something would happen to save her, and already the dawn was clearing the cloudy sky. Some of the horror of the night flew with that grey beginning of a new day, and Nora, wearied out, turned her face to the wall and fell into a heavy slumber.

CHAPTER XX.

All homeless, near a thousand homes I stood,
And near a thousand tables pined and wanted food.

WORDSWORTH.

IN the morning Nora awoke with a sudden start, and opened her eyes with the sense of something overshadowing her, some terror impending that she could not remember. But as her body drew itself from the coils of sleep, the full significance of her position dawned upon her, so she could not rest. Springing out of her bed, she began to dress for the day. She found she was savagely hungry when she had completed her toilet, and for the first time reproached her healthy body that was capable of demanding food from such a slender purse.

She thought that had she but faced the morning dull and indisposed, she would not have had the temptation to spend her last few pence upon a breakfast. But hungry as

she was, she would get nothing more than a bun and some milk when she left the lodgings. She heard the clang of the breakfast gong, and felt that meal too expensive for her. How bitterly she repented the meals she had already eaten in the house, and indeed it was foolish to have taken the room she stood in. She had flung away all her money on her personal comforts, and had not foreseen what was now before her.

There must have been some other lodgings for as much a week as she had paid here a day, and she could have done with a bun and milk for her meals, or porridge, which she could have got for a few pence.

She began to regret her haste in dressing. Why had she not remained in bed, since there was no hurry to arise. Only in sleep now could she have content and quiet from this horror of anticipation that kept turning in her brain. Well, there was always sleep, thank God. Whether in a bed or under the sky dreams would be equally beautiful; and if the miserable waking hours led to anything so delicious as sleep, she would learn to make that part the least real of her life,

and wait for the night truly to live. But even sleep was denied to the homeless. She had somewhere read of people being driven like animals through the streets, roused from their corners, and thrust from their dream-castles because the law allows no vagabond to build a palace for which he pays no taxes nor contributes anything more to the glory of the empire than a tattered body crouched somewhere in the gutter.

Again Nora thought of Daniel. If the worst came to the worst she must return to him. She would demand her right of living from him before she would dare the dangers of the streets; and yet—how could she? He had turned from her so unkindly, driving her out with his cruel words: low, indeed, would she fall before she went home.

A timid knock roused her, and she opened the door. She saw her fellow-lodger standing embarrassed before her.

"Oh," the girl said, "I'm going to leave here to-day. I've just heard of another lodging-house; it's rather lonely in that room by myself. They sleep in cubicles in

the new place, and—and—do you know, they only charge four and sixpence a week there." She stopped, red and ashamed, afraid that Nora would not understand the impulse that drove her to the door, and would ask what all this was to her.

But Nora understood. She thanked her with a tremulous smile. The girl, seeing it, was going to offer her little help to this comrade in distress, while Nora half opened her mouth to confess her inability to move anywhere except into the streets; but as they paused a little moment, smiling into each other's faces, a thin wall of reserve rose between them, and they drew asunder. Their hearts that, like children's, had leaped honestly together full of sympathy, were drawn apart, enclosed behind polite lips and false eyes.

Nora said she was not leaving just at present, and the other, expressing her sorrow, departed. Both possessed the same proud natures that were falsely ashamed of poverty, and sought to cover the shame by a pretence of prosperity. It was the same false pride that had driven Nora

forth from her home and would not let her acknowledge herself in the wrong.

She waited a moment as her friend passed down the stairs, then followed till she reached Mrs. Willoby's door. Her face was very white, a fact that did not escape the keen eye that looked up as she entered. The discovery, however, did not bring any kindliness to that eye; on the contrary, the orb became cold and offensive. Mrs. Willoby, clad in a loose red dressing-gown, so shrunken as to show the ample figure it strove so recklessly to cover, turned over a sheet of her morning paper, and, doubling it together, stuck it against the teapot, and propped it with the milk jug, embattled it on either side with sugar and butter bowls, then leaned her massive head forward and read in a loud, angry voice: "Robbery from a lodging house: thief caught in the act of rifling a desk. Unexpected development: young man of respectable parents imposing on the landlady, whose kind heart led her head astray."

She looked up at last, and pretended

to be conscious for the first time that she was not alone.

"Did you hear that, miss? This is how we poor lone women are cheated. If it's not by a rogue who breaks into your house, it's by someone under your own roof. Now look at me, I say, look at me. *You* know what I am—kind-hearted to a fault. Yet the way I am imposed upon, the way the girls I have tried to be a mother to take me in! Not as I means you, miss; you are not one of those who cheats the poor. But there are such. Not five minutes ago a girl whom I had treated as I would a daughter came in and says, 'I can't pay no longer, Mrs. Willoby,' says she, quite cool, as if she was doing me a favour, 'but will you let me keep my room for a few nights'—that's what she says—'for nothing?' But I ups and tells her it may not be, 'for I must stick to the rules made by the late Mr. Willoby, much as I hate to refuse you, my dear.' Then she begins to cry and say she had nowhere to go, as if it were my fault. I didn't make the rules. I hated to have to send her out;

it has given me quite a turn. I know I'll lie awake half the night, as I always do on such painful occasions. I have such a feeling heart, and not strong, as the late Mr. Willoby would tell you if he were here, which God be thanked he is not, for he is in a better place. He knew my heart was not strong. 'You have a weak heart, my dear,' he would say; 'it's all through so much feeling.' That's why he made such strict rules, to prevent me from being imposed on, for I have such a tender heart. I say, I have a tender heart."

Nora, whose face had been flushing from pale to red during this tirade, hastened to speak when the landlady paused for breath. The woman had evidently read the intention that had brought her in, and so refused her aid before it was asked. Nora was ashamed that she had thought of asking a favour of this creature; she had meant to request one night's lodging more on chance of finding employment, but now—how impossible! There was no hope to be had here. She drew herself up and regarded Mrs. Willoby with as cold a glare

as the landlady herself could have given her.

"I've come to say I am leaving this morning, Mrs. Willoby. I shan't require the room again."

Another moment, and the door was closed upon her. She stood in the street, walking she knew not where. On and on she went without aim or object, unless it were to make her body as weary as her brain, for the long, mournful, hungry night had left her unfit for thought or planning of any future. The only desire she felt was a strange one; it was to find some sunny corner where she could creep from the world of human beings, where she could rest safe from the dangers and cruelties that surrounded her. Some heathclad hill, with the sun upon it, where she could be amongst the heather, and listen only to the drowsy hum of the bees and see only the purple bells between her and the sky. What a dream for a poor, tired girl, splashed with mud, and wet with the chill London fog! She could not reach those Irish hills, and if she did there was no summer there even

now. Her sisters, her mother, Daniel—no, even they were becoming only a memory—the only real thing was this eternal weariness—a memory better forgotten, for they would set her brain to work again that was too weary to think. Someone knocked against her. She looked up hurriedly; a man stood leering down at her.

"Good evening, miss," he said. His look was an insult to Nora.

"How dare you speak to me?" she cried, foolishly addressing him in her rage.

"And why shouldn't I?" The fellow's gaze from admiring grew insolent. Nora hurried past. For a long time she imagined he was pursuing her, and blamed herself for answering him. At last she looked behind, and found he was not there. Dropping into a slow walk, she sought a place to rest, and with a start found herself beside the railings of a park. Almost unconscious from very weariness, she sank into a seat. As she did so, a man and woman rose from the other end, arguing together. The woman's voice was low and pleading, the man's rough and cruel.

"That —— kid is always starving," he growled in response to some request of the woman's. He drew a handful of tobacco from his pocket and began to refill his pipe. The woman, with a shrug of her thin shoulders, turned away. Starving, poor little kid! Nora realised that she, too, was starving. She heard a far-away clock strike four, and all day she had been walking without food. She turned her last sixpence in her hand, and rose to go. She would get some food, and then go back to Daniel. She could not stay away any longer. He must have pity on her. She was hungry, cold, and afraid—afraid of the night and the streets. She trembled as she rose, and a thick mist came before her eyes. She clutched at the seat, and before she could help herself, fell fainting backward, her head striking the knee of the man beside her.

"'Old up, missus!" The man attempted to push her away. "Drunk, are you? Lucky for you!"

Then seeing she was unconscious, he called to a passer-by for aid.

"Hi, gov'nor, here's a case for hospital—not my line. 'Old up 'er 'ead, and I'll call back my missus."

The "gov'nor" hurried over, an eager, hungry look in his red-rimmed eyes. He was a tall, thin man, clad in threadbare garments; his weak, kindly face was pinched and cold. He willingly took the girl from the other. Then the hand of guilt, always present and ready in the crowded streets of London, ran through her pockets, sought neck and wrist for bracelet or chain, fumbled through her garments, even slipping a thin finger into the palms of her gloves, finding at last the precious sixpence that represented Nora's all.

When he completed his search, the fellow looked kindly into her face. He beat her hands to try and bring her to, and when the others arrived on the spot, the pale woman taking the girl's shoulders in her arms, he spoke with kindly sympathy.

"Poor gal, tired out, boots splashed, skirt draggled; been out wandering all day without any dinner, I expect."

"Anything on her?"

The woman's voice was abrupt, but not ungentle.

"Money?—not a cent, poor gal." The woman eyed him with suspicion, but he returned her gaze with one of blank honesty.

"Well, can't stop. Have an important engagement at the Mansion House, and I'm no use nurse-tending." He shuffled away.

"That bloke was a gentleman once," the woman remarked. "Hear him talk. His father was a clergyman—leastways, so I've heard. It's drink as does it—ay, drink does it all."

"Stow it!" Her husband moved impatiently. "Wake the girl up, and let's get 'ome."

But Nora needed no waking. She had opened her eyes, and was staring at her companions in surprise. She tried to draw herself from the woman's hands and rise to her feet, but again a deadly faintness overcame her, and she gladly let herself drop into her place once more. The man stood looking at her a few moments, his hands deep in his pockets. His glance was one of calculation,

rather than of kindness. He eyed the girl as though appraising her value, and in his shrewd eye the quality of her garments was considered. When he had finished his scrutiny, he spat upon the ground, and with a slow movement, whether of disgust or disapproval it would be impossible to say, turned from her and walked off.

His wife, seeing neither encouragement nor annoyance in his proceeding, felt she might take the case into her own hands. Kind as only the poor are to the poor, she chafed Nora's hands and spoke to her softly. The pale young face appealed to her deeply. She saw Nora was in a state of collapse from weariness and trouble of some sort, and with an arm about her waist, half led, half supported her till they reached her own wretched home. Nora, half unconscious, only felt here was some human being who spoke to her tenderly, as gently as her own mother or as one who loved her. In her pity the woman's voice changed; the hard Cockney accent she had acquired dropped from it, the old tongue of her childhood came back to her; and Nora, half hearing, fancied

there was some friend at her elbow, for the woman spoke to her with a Dublin accent.

"Come along, alanna, lean on me. We'll soon be home. What's come to you at all, at all?"

There was a time when Nora would have been disgusted to find herself in the arms of this rather tattered and dirty woman. Now she only smiled, not seeing the mask of ugliness that surrounded the kindly soul of this good Samaritan.

CHAPTER XXI.

Then I began to think that it is very true which is commonly said, that the one half of the world knoweth not how the other half liveth.—RABELAIS.

DOWN a courtyard the woman guided Nora's steps, and entered the tenement house where she dwelt. Here she paused a moment to warn Nora of the pitfalls in the hall and staircase.

"Mind the holes," she cried, as Nora stumbled, "sure, the place is falling down over our heads." She pushed open a door on the first floor, and drew Nora into her room. The place, not more than ten feet by twelve, was nearly filled by a huge bed and a round table, which seemed at the first glance the only furniture. But near the wall several small packing-cases evidently took the place of chairs and cupboards. The window, already darkened by mud and dust, was further obliterated by a

curtain, ragged and half-hanging across it to hide the inhabitants from the view of their neighbours across the street. In the centre of the big bed sat a small child, who regarded the new-comer with wide eyes astare. Above the child's head the low ceiling bulged in an alarming manner. Around him the walls, stained and with the plaster broken in parts, made a fitting background for this picture of poverty and wretchedness. An ancient mattress on the floor, covered by a thin and faded rug, suggested the presence of some others as well as the rightful owners.

"Lie down now, and you'll be better when you wake, and Mickie there won't make a sound. To-morrow you'll be able to look around for something to do. I think I know of a woman as can help you; and when himself comes in you'll be that dead asleep you won't hear him at all. Lie down now, and I'll loosen yer dress for yer." But Nora, coming to her senses as she lay on the mattress, slowly reddened and refused the woman's offer.

"Isn't there a room," she whispered, "any place I could have to myself?"

"Lord love you!" The woman looked

at Nora and smiled. "Lord love yer!" But she said no more. How could she explain how ridiculous she thought Nora's prudery when she could not explain her own lack of it? Like all her class, she was misunderstood because she could find no words to speak her feelings. She could no more have told Nora that her modesty was ridiculous, because the poor had greater things to bother with in their struggle for food and shelter and warmth than she could have told her why she herself, who was once as timid and ashamed, got accustomed to such things. Modest! when your door, without handle or lock, will not shut? Modest! when your children are born and die in one small room, while your neighbours' voices shriek through the plaster walls? Modest! when your baby cries for food and an additional lodger sharing your room would give it ease. Ah, it hurt her, the expression of Nora's face; but then Nora did not know that Kate Wilson, had she really been the one to cause a blush, could have gone from all this wretchedness into luxury and well-being, when she was young and very pretty,

just as Jane Anderson did last week. Jane Anderson, who drove in a carriage and had a place in St. John's Wood—poor Jane Anderson. All this passed through her mind, but she could only say, "Lord love yer!" and turn the ring on her finger that had wedded her to wretchedness and misery, but which did not bid her hang her head. She considered a while, then an idea struck her.

"There's a little room next this perhaps you can have. I suppose you've no money?"

"Only sixpence." Nora sought in her pocket, and found it empty. "Oh, it's gone. I have lost it!"

Kate Wilson nodded her head.

"Just as I thought. Jack got it. Never mind, I'll manage you to-night, and to-morrow, well, we'll see. Now I'm going to make myself a cup of tea, and I'd like your company to it."

Nora thanked the woman with tears in her eyes, and, having drunk the welcome beverage, crept with a great feeling of relief into the room that Mrs. Wilson pointed out. Here was safety for another night at least.

She thrust the rickety bolt into its place, doubtful if it would hold. She looked around the tiny room, and with some disgust at the dingy bed. Here and there only the faded walls bore a resemblance of the original paper.

Then in very weariness and weakness she flung herself, dressed as she was, down on the bed, and in a moment was asleep—asleep, dreaming beautiful dreams of reunion with Daniel, in which all their woes were forgotten and only love remembered. But the moment of exhaustion over, the tired brain leapt to life again, and she started in amazement to her feet, wondering where she was and what had roused her. She heard a shrill scream, followed by a drunken shout and the sound of bodies falling on the floor above; then such growling and shuffling as made her lay her hand trembling upon the bolt of the door, afraid to draw it, and afraid to leave it fastened.

"Mrs. Wilson!" she called through the crack, and she could hear the woman coming slowly toward her door.

"What's wrong with you? Can't you sleep!?"

"My God, what's the matter? Didn't you hear the screams?"

Mrs. Wilson chuckled. "Why, that's only old Crook regulating his wife. Bless your heart, don't mind them, they are always at it. They are only enjoying themselves, honey; everyone in their own way. There's my old man coming in now, and he with a face as long as a late supper, so good-night and sleep well."

Sleep well! Nora returned to her bed, but her heart was beating wildly from her fright, so she could not rest; and had she desired to sleep, the voices of her neighbours through the thin walls came too plainly to her ears to allow her to do so. She could almost follow their doings by the noises of their movements. The heavy tread of the man Wilson as he entered his room and banged the door; the peevish cry of the awakened child, silenced by a curse, as the father lurched against the bed in his passing; the shake of the windows as his huge body dropped into a seat, and the scratch and groan of boards as he drew the chair without lifting it to the table; the blowing of his

mouth as he pulled his boots off, the thud as they fell into the corner where he threw them; and, once more, the whine of the disturbed child, wincing under each loud noise. She heard the growl of the man as he cursed his offspring again, and then there was comparative silence, dispelled only by the clatter of china, and feet shuffling to and fro from fire to table, as the wife brought a meagre supper to her lord. Nora could hear even the loud noise of his eating: the sucking in of some piece over large for his mouth, the spitting out of some unsavoury morsel, his approval or disgust all expressed in variously assorted curses. Then the loud groan of the pushed-back chair and the striking of a match told the supper ended and smoking began. The great man was evidently ready to make himself pleasant if the humour pleased him. To-night something did. Nora heard a satisfied grunt that was meant to represent a laugh. Encouraged by it, Mrs. Wilson asked:

"What's up, Bill?"

"Know Ratty Murray?"

"Yes."

"Lud, I did laugh. 'E spots an old bloke, going down town with a gold chain as big as yer arm on him. Ratty trips over a stone, and down 'e drops on the old 'un, knocking all the wind out of 'im. 'Beg yer pardon, sir,' says Ratty; ''opes as 'ow I didn't 'urt you. Let me brush yer down.' The old 'un jumped back as Ratty laid 'ands on 'im, and 'is 'at fell off. 'Yer 'at, sir,' says Ratty, quick as lightning, and down 'e jams the 'at over the old 'un's eyes, and off he runs with the ticker."

An ejaculation here of distress from Mrs. Wilson.

"Blast ye!" answers her amiable spouse, and continues his story.

"Laugh, thought I'd die. Off goes Ratty with the ticker, and turns down by Gordon Square, and, what-o! right he bumps into an old gent as was going up 'is steps to 'is 'appy 'ome, with 'is latchkey ready in 'is flipper.

"'Blast ye for a blind fool!' said the old 'un.

"'Sime 'ere,' said Ratty, 'and don't tear my Sunday coat, clumsy!' says 'e;

but the old gent 'e 'olds 'im like a lion.

"'You've got my ticker,' says 'e.

"'Yer another,' says Ratty; 'tis my poor muvver's as I was takin' to the watchmaker's.'

"'Yer in a hurry,' said the old 'un; 'it's only midnight, and there's no crowd now at the watchmaker's.'

"'It always goes that fast,' said Ratty, sorrowful like, struggling to get away; 'it got me to work ten minutes before my time to-day.'

"'Don't trouble about work,' said the old 'un; 'I'll see you get a rest for a few months,' and with that 'e yelled for the police.

"'Blast yer jaw!' said Ratty Murray, trying to down him; but the old chap was too strong, and 'eld Ratty down on the step. Then the 'all door opened, and a female stood lookin' out, screechin', 'Enery, 'Enery, what are you a-doin' of?' says she. 'Blast ye, 'Enery,' says she, 'let the man go!'

"'Stow yer jaw!' says 'Enery, 'and

'ollow for 'elp. The fellow 'as robbed me.'

"'Murder! Fire!' screams the female. 'Police!'

"'Yer a liar!' said Ratty. 'I never took yer ticker.'

"''Elp!' screamed the female. 'Wot's a ticker?' says she. And not waiting for an answer, yelled, 'My 'usband's ticker is took!'

"'It's not in my pocket,' said the old gent. ''And it over now, and I'll let ye off.'

"Laugh, you bet I did laugh. Ratty, 'e saw the game was up, for the police were running along the square, and the winders was being opened all around.

"'Tike it, thief,' 'e says; 'you've stolen me muvver's watch,' and with that he threw the ticker in the old un's face. 'What are you robbing the man for, 'Enery?' screamed the 'orrified female.

"'Stow yer jaw!' said the gent. 'Don't you see it's my watch 'e was trying to nab off me?'

"'Garn on!' said she. 'Wot put that into yer 'ed?' said she.

"'Why, 'e bumped into me, and when I put my 'ands into my pockets my watch was gone, so I knew 'e took it, and 'ere it is.'

"'That's not your watch, 'Enery," said she. 'You left your watch at 'ome this morning; it's on the bureau in the study,' says she; and then Ratty Murray escaped in the crowd, and left the old 'un to explain 'ow 'e 'ad some other fellow's watch. Wot oh! I did laugh."

Nora heard the sound of a chair being pushed back, then a low murmur from Mrs. Wilson.

"No; it wasn't me as took it. Blast ye, coffin face!" shouted her spouse in a voice that again woke the child and set it whimpering. "Blast you, and the kid, and everybody!" With this pious prayer he evidently fell asleep, for a loud snore came through the wall to Nora's tortured ears. The little voice of a child and the low whisper of a woman went on for some time in chorus to this, then ceased. The Wilsons were asleep.

But sleep did not come to Nora so

quickly; in the horror of her surroundings she learnt at last all that she had lost in leaving her little home and all its fancied miseries behind; every hour of her life there she now counted a blessing: the warmth, the love, the care, the comfort—all this had been hers, and she had not known it till they were gone. The snoring brute in the next room had not been allotted to her, nor this house that shook under a light wind; she had not been, as the tenants here, beaten by fate, nor by her fellows. God had not sent her upon this earth full of disease, twisted, sore, hunted into the crumbling corners of the city, into houses that shake to fall, into dangers that threaten only the poor.

Yet into some of these misfortunes she had plunged herself by her own free will, by her carelessness and pride: carelessness that had let Daniel's love go from her without an effort to keep it; pride that she should have gone from his house without seeking pardon and making an effort at reconciliation. To rush out as she did: how could she have done it? To go away without

one farewell; to go, never, never to return or see her husband's face again: did she ever really in her heart of hearts think this? Or did she not throughout dream that he would have sought her and forgiven her? But he had not, or he would have found her, surely, by now. And since he did not, she would try and forget him. He had forgotten her, or only thought of his own release from a wife who grumbled and scorned all he could give.

How could she sleep with this on her mind, and with thinking of the days to come—the years that had only weariness in them? Was her life to be as one of these creatures that dwelt in this terrible house? So she lay face down on the pillow, wet with her tears, and again voices came through the thin walls forbidding her to sleep.

"Let us get out, father. I'm stifled here. Let us take a little walk. The night is fine. I've been at it from dawn till now. I'm sick of the beastly things."

Nora heard the shuffling of chairs, then the voice of an old man, evidently suffering from bronchitis.

"I don't believe I can, son. I'm dead beat after yesterday. I walked to Croydon, and only sold three when I got there."

"Look here, father, you'll kill yourself with these goings-on. A few days ago you walked to Blackheath. You can't stand that sort of thing now."

"That's a pretty landscape, son. I expect eighteenpence for it at least. I think they look as well on cardboard as they did on canvas, eh? And it's much cheaper. Or two shillings—do you think I might ask two shillings for it?"

"You might, father. That will work out at a halfpenny an hour for us. So don't be too unreasonable. Don't ask too much." There was a sneer in the young voice.

"Well, well, you know we can't get more. I'll ask two shillings, and take one and sixpence—eh, son?"

A grunt was the only response. Then more shuffling and the closing of a door.

Nora heard a clock somewhere strike two, and lay staring into the gloom of the little room, feeling she could never sleep again, and praying for that oblivion to end

her worries for a few hours at least. Even as she thought that blessing would not be granted, and that she must lie through the tedious hours without rest, her eyes closed and sleep came to her, heavy and dreamless.

CHAPTER XXII.

Oh God! that bread should be so dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap!

HOOD.

WHEN Nora opened her eyes, her first thought was that she had not slept at all, for a low murmur of voices in the other room continued the conversation of the night before, the wheezy voice of the old man questioning:

"I don't think two shillings would be asking too much for this, son. Look at it in the daylight. It's good, I tell you: it's good. How are you getting on at your fields, eh? My, but it's a dark morning."

Nora turned on her bed. Why, it was the morning, but so early; few were stirring in the street. In the Wilsons' room Nora could hear a bustling to and fro, the hammering of coals being broken, and the stirring of a fire, then the murmur of a woman's voice trying to rouse her husband.

"Wake up, Bill; it's just after five. You will be late at the works."

Several times Nora could hear the woman's voice. Then with a roar her husband woke; as he had gone to bed cursing, so he rose. There was little conversation between the two, except his muttered complaints and her efforts to get him to go to his work. Nora turned on her bed, feeling there was no need for her to rise. The morning brought no comfort; she dreaded the long day she would have to face. But the kindly voice of Mrs. Wilson at her door forced her to get up at last.

"I've brought you a little cup of tea, miss. Did you sleep well? Himself is out. Come and have a heat at the fire."

Nora opened her door, glad of the friendly voice that greeted her.

"Why, you are dressed and all," Mrs. Wilson exclaimed. "You are an early bird."

Nora smiled. She did not explain that she had not taken off her clothes, and her tossed appearance meant nothing to the frowsy woman who watched her, and who

never had time even to smooth her own hair.

Nora willingly followed Mrs. Wilson to her room, and seated herself at the rickety table. She sipped her tea out of the cracked cup with relish, and nibbled the bread and dripping put beside it by her hostess. The woman watched her with a pleased smile, seemingly unconscious of the untidiness of the room: the fender of ashes, the unmade bed, the clothes flung here and there about the place. Then, ashamed of appearing to spy upon her visitor while she ate, she started a sudden hurry of cleanliness. She gathered the ashes, swept the hearth, smoothed the bed, folded and laid the tossed clothes on one side. Her cleaning did not take long, there was no room to move or put anything away.

"How can I thank you, Mrs. Wilson?" Nora said. "You have been very kind to me, and I cannot repay you."

Mrs. Wilson laughed her into silence.

"Kind? What have I done at all, at all? Is it refuse you a cup of tea, and you ill? Or left you to die out in the park?

You wouldn't have refused it to me if I was in your house, miss. Would you now?"

Nora murmured denial, but in her heart she wondered. Would she have taken this strange and untidy woman into her house and offered her tea and rest? No; if she had come to her, she would have driven her from the door, for that is the law of the well-to-do to the meanly clad. She felt ashamed of partaking of this poor woman's generosity.

"I must get something to do to-day," she said. "Can you suggest anything, Mrs. Wilson?"

Mrs. Wilson pursed up her lips, considering:

"Well, miss, I can, strange to say. If you had come a day ago, I couldn't, but to-day I think I can. Charing you could not do by the looks of you; there's a job of it I might have got you, but there's another turned up. The Crooks have got the chuck-out from the rooms above, and there's a young couple from Russia coming to take their place. Poor creatures, they are only married eight months, and the woman has her trouble coming on her, so she is not fit

for anything, and she can't do no work. He's a boot-finisher. I've known them since they came over, as nice a young couple as yer would see in a day's walk; but, God help them, they are very poor. He has to work night and day to earn anything at all, and now his wife can't help him, and she's fretting herself ill."

"What was she?" Nora asked with sympathy.

"She had a little job addressing envelopes, but she was slow. She made about five shillings a week at it; and that's the job I think yer can get if yer want to."

"Oh, but I can't take it from her," Nora explained in dismay.

"She's lost it; she can't go on no longer, bless yer."

"What will they do then? And when the baby comes, how will they live, these people?"

"He doesn't get more than one and ninepence a dozen, and he has to supply materials that would cost him about twopence on the dozen. And the dozen would take him six

hours to finish. That's not the job for a married man, is it ?"

Nora sighed. What a terrible world she had fallen into. Not many weeks ago she had grumbled at her own seeming poverty and lamented the lack of luxuries. These people had necessities to weep over. She moved restlessly in her place.

"I'd be glad to get anything to do, Mrs. Wilson," she said eagerly, as though anxious to make up for her former lack of appreciation of the good fortune that had been allotted to her. "Give me the address now, and I will go at once and see if I can get taken in the place of that poor woman."

"Strike while the iron's hot," said Mrs. Wilson, "and good luck go with ye." She gave Nora the address ; and she, after drawing the key out of the rickety lock of her door, went forth on her search for work. She reached the dingy office before it was opened for the day. A dirty charwoman emptied a bucket of water over the pavement as she came down the steps, then looked surlily at Nora, as if sorry the slop had missed her.

None of the young ladies had arrived yet; she would have to wait, she informed Nora, who retreated from her vigorous cleaning to a safe distance and waited till a girl pushed her way into the hall. The first of the young ladies, no doubt, had arrived. Nora followed her.

"I've come to take Mrs. Otto's place," she said eagerly. "She's not able to come for a time. Who can I see about it? Do you think I may begin now?"

The girl pointed dully to a stool. Words were not her extravagance, evidently.

"That's her stool. Go on till the boss comes." She hung her limp and shabby hat on one of a row of hooks, and climbing on to a high stool, plunged into her own work, not heeding Nora's second question. Nora looked on the desk before her, but beyond a heap of envelopes saw nothing further to tell her what to do. She again appealed to her companion to tell her how to begin, but the girl turned half savagely to her.

"Wait till the boss comes, I say. How can I tell you what to do? Maybe he won't take you at all."

Nora's apology was met by a shrug of the shoulders, and the two sat in silence for some minutes.

When two more girls had arrived, Nora began to get impatient and nervous. These heavy-eyed, pale-cheeked girls were not going to help her, she could see. The new-comers, after their first glance, which looked over her from head to foot, hung their shabby hats on the pegs, and climbing into their seats, went on with their work.

After a long wait the boss arrived, an elderly man with a stubby beard. His small, piercing eye roved round the room as he hung his coat and hat up behind the door. It fastened upon Nora.

"Well, what are you doing here?" he snapped. "This is no place for idleness. No chattering allowed!" The girls bent more closely over their work; evidently the boss was in a bad humour.

Nora's face flushed, but she summoned her courage and advanced towards him.

"I came to see if I could have Mrs. Otto's work; she is sick and cannot come."

"I know she is sick and cannot come;

she told me that herself," he growled, eyeing her.

"Can you write?" as Nora did not answer.

Nora smiled at the question, but the boss shouted her into gravity.

"What are you sniggering at? I asked you, can you write? It's not a conundrum."

Nora drew herself up haughtily. After all, she could not allow herself to be spoken to like this.

"Certainly I can," she said.

"Well, you can go to her desk, and copy out addresses. Miss Williams will show you what to do; and, mind! no chattering, and no airs!"

For the first time Nora realised that beggars cannot be choosers, and so, without airs, went humbly to her seat, where Miss Williams provided her with information as to her work, and where she sat the rest of the day copying addresses till her fingers were stiff and her head ached, until she was as chary of words as her neighbours, and as pale and heavy-eyed. In the luncheon hour

when the boss, without a word, left the office in search of food, the others drew from their pockets and bags whatever they had in the way of eatables; but Nora bent closer over her desk, as if forgetting such a time had arrived. In the afternoon the boss's tea was brought in, which he sipped with loud, succulent noises and much smacking of heavy lips. The odour of the tea made Nora feel a little faint, but the others went on as if they did not realise there was anyone beside themselves in the room. When the time came for going, Nora got off her stool and, approaching the man, asked in a small voice if he would pay her for the day's work done. Her head was down, shame was on her cheeks. She said certain circumstances forced her to ask. In her heart she knew that had she not been so hungry she would not have dared.

"I pay by the week," the man said coldly. He was struggling into his overcoat.

"But——"

"Can't be done." The man was gone.

Nora stood in dismay. She felt dazed

and a little distraught with weariness and starvation. She did not think she could get home. She stood putting on her hat and looking through the dirty window at the passers-by—some in their carriages, some on foot, all prosperous and comfortable-looking. She began to hate them in her hunger; her wearied brain worked itself into a little madness. She would go out to them and demand their help. She would ask it as her due, one fellow creature to another, that they should protect her, and not let her die among them. If they would not hear, she would take something of their warmth and comfort from them. She would not steal finery or money, but she would take from them her right to live in the world; she would refuse to starve in a city of extravagance and riches. She turned to the door, and met Miss Williams.

The girl went back to her desk, and opened it. She felt round among the things as if seeking something, but her eye all the time was fixed on Nora; then with an awkward rush, she went to her and laid a

two-shilling piece on the desk beside her.

Nora pushed it away indignantly; but Miss Williams was not to be refused.

"You can pay me on Saturday," she said abruptly, "and if you leave it there, the charwoman will steal it, and I'll lose it altogether, for I won't take it with me. Good-night. Pull the door after you." Miss Williams was gone.

Nora took the coin and wept over it, in a weak way. She felt how low she had come to borrow money at all, and then, being of an optimistic nature, she brightened a bit, and pulling the door after her, as she was told, went into the street. The sharp air caused her to catch her breath. She stood a moment, then saw before her the lights of a tea-shop, and went towards it, colliding in her weakness with a young man.

"Wot oh! Emma," he exclaimed, good-humouredly. "'Ad a little drop of gin?" He attempted to take her arm.

Nora pushed by him, and going into the tea-shop, sunk into a seat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Even God's Providence seeming estranged.—HOOD.

WHEN she reached her lodging that night she was too weary to do more than nod a brief good-night to Mrs. Wilson, though the woman followed her to her room, evidently longing for a chat and the news of Nora's day.

"The Ottos have come," she volunteered, as Nora was silent; "they are upstairs in their room; they do look bad, and the poor gal so near her trouble. You can 'ear him hammering at his work—boot-finishing it is." She paused to listen, and Nora could hear a faint tap, tap, tap coming through the ceiling.

"There they go, hard at it, nearly all night, I'll be bound. One and ninepence a dozen, and he buying twopence-worth of stuff out of it!"

Nora felt herself guilty of taking the poor wife's work from her, and said so; but Mrs. Wilson scoffed her into silence. The woman had given it up before Nora had applied. She asked Nora how she had got on, and remarked on the roughness of the man called the boss. "But he might be worse, miss, if he were more friendly. You're a pretty girl, miss, and some of the men are devils." Nora hushed her into silence, and put her outside the door with a smile.

"I can hardly speak from weariness, Mrs. Wilson. I'll go to sleep in a minute, here on the chair." Motherly Mrs. Wilson laughed and went out, but that was not the end of Mrs. Wilson for many hours yet, as Nora could hear her through the walls after she flung herself upon the bed.

With the many sounds that came to her she could not sleep, when she thought sleep would come without effort. The Wilsons falling into silence after a time did not end the noises; in the late night a rowdy crowd passed her room on their way to some other chamber, a drunken shoulder pushed her door so that it strained its crazy lock, and

rattled as if to spring open. Nora sprang up, her heart beating wildly; but the rioters went on, and she sank back panting from the shock. Tap, tap, tap, untiring came the blows of a hammer from the room above; it seemed now to be beating on her tortured nerves. A clock struck one somewhere, but she tossed in unceasing wakefulness. She had not yet removed her clothes, and yet felt too weary to make the effort. Her nerves burnt through her body, yet cold seemed to quiver along her spine. She shivered and threw the bedclothes from her.

She thought of Daniel with sorrow and longing, and again with anger. Why had he not looked for her? Why did he not come? Never for a moment had she imagined he would not have tracked her; she knew this now. She had only been trying the everlasting crown of woman's tactics —the power of the chase. "Let the one elude, must the other pursue." Was there ever a boy that would not hunt the hiding mouse? Was there ever a youth that did not run behind the fleeing hare? Was there

ever a man who did not seek the woman who appeared to want him not—that is if the woman did not run too late, if she hid before his desire was dead. Indifference would not seek far for any maid.

Was Daniel's love dead? If so, what was she to do—how live? Her week's earnings already pledged, where was she to turn? Mrs. Wilson would have to be paid for room and breakfast. That must be done, yet what would she earn by the end of the week? She did not yet know. The two shillings she got from Miss Williams she resolved would buy her food for the seven days—a glass of milk, a hunch of bread, some porridge, a cup of tea—yes, she could easily live on that till her money came. If Mrs. Wilson would only give her breakfast and the room till then! And after the week was over and she got the money for her work she should see her way better. If Daniel never came for her she would not seek him. She could picture him so comfortably at rest, in his soft bed, asleep, no doubt, and dreaming of his next great masterpiece.

Tap, tap, tap. Still above her head the

noise went on. Ah, if Daniel could see how some men worked for love of their wives! This poor youth, what must his dreams have been to bring him to England for his honeymoon, and thus to end them? What must their lives be, the pale man and the sick woman in the room above, waiting for that event that was to be their crowning misery instead of joy, an added mouth to feed when two were over-many? Tap, tap, tap. Why didn't he go and sleep, and lose himself in dreams, or meet there the young, joyous mother with his child upon her breast, and forget the thin girl who looked at him with terror in her sunken eyes? He who dare not comfort and wish her safely through, back to him and starvation. She had taken the bread from them by getting this poor creature's work. What matter Mrs. Wilson's denial, still she felt it was true; but she too must live. She would live! Everyone for himself. What did he matter who tortured her with his hammering—oh, if he would stop and let her sleep. She flung herself from side to side in a fever of weariness.

Suddenly, as she lay tortured, her hands clasping her burning head, the sound of a voice came to her, a woman's voice, sweet and clear, singing some unknown song. The lovely music stole upon her and wrapped her round in its mercy. It straightened her twisted limbs, smoothed the wrinkles from her forehead, closed her burning eyes, so that she lay relaxed and breathing like a little child. Easy tears flowed down her cheek. She turned upon her pillow as a babe would do on its mother's heart, and with a gentle sigh she slept.

In the morning she was awakened by the tap, tap, tap of the worker in the room above. It was almost dark, and Nora guessed it to be not later than between four and five. Mrs. Wilson had not yet stirred. She would try to help that poor Mrs. Otto when she could, by comforting her, by the use of her two strong hands, if not by money. She felt she could not sleep, so rose and began to dress. She thought of the song she had heard in the night, and wondered if the woman above had heard it too, and if it had comforted her in like manner.

Who had sung that lovely song? Who

possessed that pure and perfect voice, so full, as it was, of tenderness and pity? So might a mother sing to her child crying in the night, hushing the babe to peace and sleep. What dear woman held such a gift in that dreadful house, and how could Nora meet and know her? Here was someone who would understand and help. And as she dressed, the song came again, faint and beautiful, filling the room with music. She opened the door and stepped out to listen. The sound came from a back room on the next floor. Still drowsy with sleep, and half mesmerised with the soft singing, Nora forgot the place she was in, and leaving her door open, went towards the room that held the singer. As she stood before the door, the singing came more loudly to her ear, and the words of the song became plain. The beautiful voice seemed to call to her, and the words with the sweet old Irish air, how well she knew them:

"Come, rest in this bosom, my own stricken deer,
Though the herd has fled from thee, thy home is still here;
Here still is the smile that no cloud could o'ercast,
And a heart and a hand all thine own to the last!"

Impulsively and full of some foolish hope, Nora flung the door open and went into the room.

A great shout stopped her on the threshold, and she stood a moment dazed.

The room was full of men; bottles and glasses lay about the place, on the floors, and on the chairs, whose owners had long ceased to sit on them, and who were now lying on the boards, sleeping off their intoxication. Three or four women, painted and dull-eyed, crouched amongst the men, leering and laughing. In the centre of all upon the table a stout young woman sat, in her chubby hands a bottle and glass, whilst from her full red mouth and sensuous lips flowed forth the exquisite song that had drawn Nora to the door.

As she stood, amazed and disgusted, loathsome hands grabbed at her dress and tried to draw her in, loud laughter followed her flying feet as she tore herself away, a drunken attempt was made to follow her, and then she reached her room.

Mrs. Wilson was standing wondering on the threshold.

"Wherever have you been?" she said. "I came to tell you to come to breakfast, and you was gone." She heard the shouts from below, and turned on Nora, a bit suspiciously. "You have never been there?"

Nora, gasping and pale, nodded.

"I heard her singing," she said. "It was so beautiful, I thought she must be a —a—lady."

Mrs. Wilson laughed.

"Why, that's Maggie Marlow, the worst lot in London. Has she been having one of her parties? She's on the music-hall stage, and gives a lark after one of her successes, as she calls them. She's doing the pretty innocent, I hear, now—could be heard by a bishop; but as a rule her songs are—well, come and have yer tea."

Nora gratefully followed Mrs. Wilson into the room, the untidy place which seemed a haven of refuge to her, almost like a home —certainly a spot where she was safe in these horrible surroundings. She kissed the solemn-eyed child that lay half asleep in bed, drew a chair to the table, and listened to Mrs. Wilson's long account of the various

lodgers who dwelt in the tenement house. The description did not tend to make Nora more satisfied with her surroundings. She left Mrs. Wilson, feeling more depressed than she had been on entering, and went to her business with a heavy heart.

The boss had no complaint to make of their chattering that day, for Nora was as little inclined to talk as the other girls. Knowing she would be paid by the number of dozens, she worked as quickly as possible at her envelopes; her fingers were stiff and cramped at the unusual writing, and her head, bent all day in the stuffy atmosphere, ached so that when lunch time came she was glad to eat her bun in quietness.

She saw Miss Williams glance at her as she drew out her own luncheon, and so taking the bun from her pocket, she smiled back, which served them for conversation. The other girls did not even notice if Nora ate or not.

Thus uneventfully Nora dragged out a week, and on the pay-day received seven shillings. She was bitterly disappointed at the sum, and annoyed at her own slowness

that she could not earn more. Her first duty was to return Miss Williams the two shillings she had lent her.

She poured a stream of gratitude into the girl's ear, murmuring the platitude of never forgetting her kindness—all of which Miss Williams received quietly. She only remarked stolidly, when Nora had finished, "That's all right," and, gathering up her few odds and ends, bid Nora a brief good-day.

Nora went home without much elation, considering she had her first earnings in her pocket; at the same time she had some feeling of independence, and thought no more of going back to Daniel. Her pride was up, now that she found she could make a few shillings of her own. Next week, she thought, she would do twice as much, and so on. She remarked her own thin face in passing a glass, and was glad of it. Daniel would see what he had made her suffer when he came across her, as of course he must. It was absurd to suppose Fate had brought them together for so much of their lives only to cast them asunder for ever.

Nothing is so hard to imagine as that we shall never see our absent friend again. Not even death can banish that hope. Full of despair indeed the heart must be that is not convinced of this, for hope is like the lark, springing from the black earth and eternally flying upward from one of the most lowly nests that God has made. So springs hope even from our darkest sorrows.

CHAPTER XXIV.

And death and life she hated equally,
And nothing saw, for her despair,
But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,
No comfort anywhere.

TENNYSON.

WHEN Nora reached her lodgings she did not knock on Mrs. Wilson's door, as she had intended, to pay her debts, for she heard the loud voice of the woman's husband, and knew he was spending one of his rare evenings at home. As a matter of fact, he had no money to go elsewhere, so he told his wife on her asking something from him. He had thrown her ten shillings, saying that was all he could make in these hard times, and that the child ate more than the two of them put together. Mrs. Wilson, surprised at the moderate tone of his complaints, beamed with good humour. The getting of her Saturday night's money for the week

was generally accompanied by a black eye or a bruised jaw; to-night, for a wonder, her man only cursed, and did not go out, as on previous occasions, to spend all he had of remaining coins. But Wilson had his own reasons for remaining quiet that night.

"Ratty is caught," he grunted.

"Is he now? What for?"

"House-breaking, 'caught in the hact.' Opened 'is mouth too big, 'e did."

"What did he say?" Nora knew by the clatter of plates which accompanied Mrs. Wilson's movements that she was setting the supper, an operation which always seemed to be accompanied by more noise than effect.

"The landlord of the 'Blue Lion' caught him, and whistled up the police. Ratty said he was only sleeping in the shed, and woke up to go 'ome, but the landlord 'e said 'e saw 'im trying to force a winder.

"'Say you saw me, did you?' says Ratty.

"'Yes, I saw you,' says the landlord.

"'Anyone with me?' says Ratty.

"'Can't say there was,' says the landlord.

"'Did you see a man with me?' says Ratty, like a lawyer.

"'No,' says the landlord.

"'Well, there was one,' says Ratty, proud as a peacock, 'so there!' forgetting of 'imself. Bloomin' fool, Ratty."

Nora heard the sound of Wilson loudly proceeding with his meal.

"Did the other get off?" asked his wife. Twice she repeated this question before he growled:

"He did."

There was something in his voice evidently that caused Mrs. Wilson to look upon the man she had sworn to love and honour in a way he did not appreciate, for the next words heard in the room were a total disapproval of her eyes, her person, her child, and the entire race of humanity. From launching her into the depths of limbo he drew her back, to reproach her for being the most extravagant woman he had ever heard of. Nora could hear him strike a match, and knew that the soothing process of smoking had begun.

"Where's the ten shillings I gave you last week?" he questioned.

"Well, the young lady had to get a share of that this week," she began. Nora heard the quick pushing back of a chair.

"Oh, she 'ad, 'ad she? Who am I, to be keepin' all the hussies in London for nothing? I'm a bloomin' millionaire I am. 'Aven't you a few orphant children I can adopt? Let them all come!"

Nora trembled. She crept forward to slip the bolt, and, finding it would not fasten, put a chair against the door; but Mrs. Wilson hastened to appease her husband's wrath.

"Why, she is working; she is going to pay. It's only a cup of tea or so."

"Oh, she is goin' to pay, is she? And when is she goin' to pay?"

Mr. Wilson's voice had fallen to more calmness. He was evidently interested.

"Well, to-morrow will do," Mrs. Wilson said soothingly. "She got her pay to-day, and I suppose she did not like to come in and you being here. I'll go and ask her now, if you like; she's straight enough!"

"Stow it!" Wilson said calmly; "let her be. I suppose she has it all right—you're

sure of that, though? I don't want to be let down."

"Oh, yes, she will pay on Saturday, same as the Ottos."

"Wot room 'as she?" Mr. Wilson was evidently giving little attention to his wife.

"Next ours." Mrs. Wilson seemed quite gleeful at being let off so easy. Her man was quiet now. "Shall I run in and see if she is there? She won't mind, bless you."

"Stow it," Wilson shouted, and said no more for the evening. Nora could hear them moving apart, Mrs. Wilson settling the child for the night, and clearing the supper things. Then she herself drew the chair from the door, and strove to fix the rickety lock in its place. She ate her frugal supper by the light of her candle, which she soon blew out to save for another time. Then she crept into her bed at an early hour, having nothing to read and no one to talk to. She prayed for sleep to keep her from thinking, and while she prayed fell into a delicious slumber.

She woke with a sudden start in the

dark of the night. She knew something had awakened her, but though she listened without moving she heard nothing—not a sound in the house that was usually so full of noise. The tap, tap of the poor shoemaker in the room above was silent, so she knew it must be that black hour before the dawn, when all but evil is asleep. She tried to pierce the shadows, but could see nothing, only a faint ray from the street lamp that had not power to light up the room, but touched the dressing-table with a faint glow. She looked towards the door, wondering if it had opened, but could not see. Then she thrust a foot from under the bedclothes, but hastily drew it back, trembling with fear, and dared not rise to strike a light.

Without movement, she lay silent, listening, and knew someone was there in her little room, listening too. Her heart began to beat so wildly that it seemed to shake the bed where she was lying. And as yet the intruder made no sound.

Then a board creaked ever so slightly. Nora opened her mouth to scream, but

found she could not. She seemed to feel a touch upon her head, then realised that it was her own hair stirring under her terror. She thrilled from head to foot, with waves of hot and cold running through her body.

Then she saw a movement of something in the dim light which the street lamp threw across the dressing-table. It was a man's hand, groping over the soiled cover. Nothing could she see but this hand, now joined by its fellow, searching under the looking-glass and cloth for something. Then evidently not finding what they wanted, turned her way—two large hands, with crooked and dirty fingers opening and shutting as they felt their way in silence to the bed.

For a moment Nora thought of slipping down between the wall and the couch to the floor; again of jumping up and striking those awful fingers with the chair or whatever she could reach, and shrieking aloud for help. But, knowing her scream would avail little in this house, where screams were so common as to be unheeded, or if heeded bringing something worse to the complainers, thought her one safety would be to

pretend to sleep. To fight this hidden monster would be impossible.

She lay, all her nerves strained to the utmost, her body stiff as the dead, when the groping hands reached her. They touched her face and passed over her hair, and yet she did not move. They groped over the coverlet she held so tight across her throat, over the labouring blankets that billowed on her panting heart. Then she knew their owner understood that she was awake and afraid; and when they knew this, the hands groped no longer carefully, but carelessly enough, without pretence of silence, under her pillow and mattress, and at last went from her to the end of the bed, where her clothes hung from one of the pillars. There they tumbled her garments till the ring of coins told the treasure trove was reached. A creak of a board and a slight bang of the door, and Nora was alone.

For a moment she lay without movement, breathing her relief; then she sprang from the bed and to the door. The broken lock came off in her hand. She listened, and heard a sound in the Wilsons' room, other-

wise the house seemed still wrapped in sleep.

She thought of pulling the bed before the door for safety; but, realising all was lost, thrust a chair there to keep the door shut. There was nothing left for her to lose; her week's savings were gone. She could not go through another week owing Mrs. Wilson. In the dark night despair, like a black bird, clutched her and fed upon her without a struggle. She flung herself upon her bed and wept.

What a world to live in! What a civilisation! That she should have been robbed in a house that knew what poverty was, by someone who understood what she had gone through to make those few precious shillings! The poor robbed by the poor! That destroyed her last interest in life. What was there to live for, after all? The few joys the world ever gave her were over. Even in her childhood there had only been the happiness her own youth had brought her and her sisters.

Terror and grief had been measured to them by their father, and disgrace. The

timid struggle of her mother to make things easy for all now stood out in all its awful pathos; that grey and joyless woman had once been a happy girl. The world was full of such failures. She herself was one. She remembered with shame her first meeting with her husband; his youthful, impulsive generosity that had bid him champion her, and made him fancy himself in love; his final disillusion and last out-thrusting words. Now she had come to this, a beggar with nothing to look forward to worth the living for. She would not, if she could, return to her mother's home. What her father would do to such a failure she shuddered to think. She would not return to Daniel to keep the law and live with a man who no longer wished for her. After all, as she lay there, these people associated with her past were but shadows, shadows that belonged to the earth where she did not tread, where there was some sunshine, if at times gloom, where there were flowers and the songs of birds to be often heard if the falling of tears were there also.

But with her there was nothing save

darkness and struggle in the future, no prospect of any happiness to look forward to, no desire save what the wish to live would bring her, to keep her body alive. She would have to sweat and starve and struggle with all her might, or she would go down and be trampled under the feet of those neighbours who had more muscle and strength than she herself.

To live, to exist, with such a future, to work so for a bit of food to thrust into that body to make it work again! Without hope, without change, to be weary, heartsore, headsore. To go, full of suspicion of her neighbours, full of fear of them, with nothing to look forward to in her days save the oblivion of sleep—all this to keep her tired body out of the black earth a few years longer. Was it worth it?

She heard a step in the street below her: the lamplighter was quenching the street light. Dawn was here, the dawn of another day, another hungry, hopeless day. She opened her eyes, and now saw the faint outline of the room. A bright gleam from the chair beside her attracted her attention; for

the moment she thought it was the flash of silver, some of her shillings overlooked; then the folly of it took her. The thief had left her nothing. She put forth her hand and grasped at the shining object. It was the knife she had used at her supper. What a strange thing the dawn had pointed out to her. She raised it in her hand, and turned it over—an old knife worn to a point almost dagger-shaped. Was there any meaning in this for a sign?

Who was tempting her? Was it devil or saint, that at such a moment of despair this should come to her hand? Was it an evil spirit who thought to conquer her soul in its weakness, or a good one who wished to rid the world of so useless a being?

Curiously she felt the sharp point of the knife with her fingers. What would happen to her if she used it in violence against herself? Would it hurt much, or would death be easy? And after death——

After death, as for the moment all her half-forgotten religious training had taught her, she would live again. Where would she go? What should she do?

The one thing she was certain of striving for would be to reach her husband and watch his grief, measure his affection for her by his sorrow, and to see him again. She longed for him so—just to see him, even if he did not know she had come! But Daniel was always reserved in his expression of emotion. Could she see more deeply into his heart then than now? Or would he hold himself aloof from her prying eyes? Sitting with the news held to his face, would he but murmur, "Dead!" and lay the paper on his knee, to smoke, with thoughtful mien, and so elude her?

Perhaps, though, she could not go to Daniel. How could she plan what would happen in that strange place beyond the grave, a world without a future or a past, without human love, without even the light of day or the shadow of night, where—and, curiously enough, this seemed to hurt her most in her weariness of body—there would be no sleep?

Nora turned upon her pillow and laid the knife down. Her safety was coming with this mental discussion. She began to

be afraid. She thought of the countless dead upon the other side, and wondered if they would be free to surround and reproach her for her crime. She fancied a gibbering crowd reckoning their sins against hers for the day of judgment.

She thought the blood of her body would go, like Abel's, to the Lord, and He would condemn the spirit that, like Cain, had done evil to His handiwork.

And what dared she say in her excuse for her failure as a wife and as a citizen of the world? That she should not be blamed because she left a vacant spot that it was not necessary to anyone that she should fill? Foolish and weak she had been, unable to hold her little place as the helpmate of one man, not able to sweeten his days and do her duty cheerfully. She had destroyed her home, and brought her own misfortunes upon her path. Yet this very weakness, the cause of her despair, was it her fault? Rather was it not inherited from others: her poor mother, trying to please the tyrannical humours of her father, and trembling before his anger; and her father,

never conquering his desires, but a prey to his passions always, and a slave to his love of wine? She would have fought her fight better had she been born of stronger stock.

Would this avail her for her excuse?

Or would she be condemned with the rest of the weaklings who spoiled the superb planning of the world and destroyed its perfection? She thought of the little Christ in the carpenter's shop, watching Joseph as he selected and fitted his work piece to piece. There He would have seen him fling the rotten and imperfect pieces aside, and only keep the good. So would He cast her from His great work of creation if she utterly failed without sacrifice or struggle.

She began to cry softly, and her bitterness fell from her. Little prayers, half forgotten, came to her like whispers from some other lips. The thought of the Christ-child filled her heart with a new emotion. His life story came to her in all its sorrow. It was no terrible God she was appealing to, but a merciful Christ, who sorrowed for her failures. He had made a fair world, but man had destroyed it. No wonder she had

almost forgotten God in this horrible place she had fallen into, where there was nothing to remind her of Him. Even the great sun He had kindled for their warmth was veiled by the smoke from men's chimneys, and the pale night lamp he had lit lest they should go afraid in the darkness was outshone by the glow of the street lights.

She slipped out of bed upon her knees and prayed for strength, the very movement bringing her trouble more keenly to her. The cold of the room, the hunger that gnawed her, the chill grey of the light that showed up the miserable place which she was too poor to keep after to-day, all caused her, even as she prayed, to turn her eyes upon the knife that lay beside her, and her thoughts, against her will, to wonder if it were not easier to chance what mercy she would find in another world than to risk what she, a woman, would meet in this. In the midst of her musings she could hear the singing of Meg Marlow, who was evidently having another of her parties. *There* was a successful woman who had conquered her misfortunes. Nora shuddered.

CHAPTER XXV.

To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And baffled, sit up and begin again.

BROWNING.

SUDDENLY the song was silenced by a scream, loud and terrible. Nora could hear someone running overhead, and the sound of a door opening. The knife fell on the floor forgotten. She began to slip on her clothes. Something must have happened, though in that house where such sounds were common no one minded. The song began again, but Nora could hear the sound of a man's heavy sobbing, coming to her from the room above. And again the woman's shrill screams, this time on the stairs, coming towards her door.

She went out and beheld a young woman, pale and dishevelled, hurrying down. When she saw Nora she turned and rushed back,

like one distraught, calling upon her to follow.

Nora ran into the room after her, where a terrible sight met her eyes.

On a wretched bed in the corner of the room lay a young man, dead, the blood from his wounded throat sinking into the thin blanket which he had drawn to his chin, either in a pitiful effort to hide his crime, or in the convulsions of his death.

Nora swayed in a sudden sickness. The woman she had followed stood at the foot of the bed, clutching the broken rail, tearless in her horror, her drawn face and hollow eyes telling of her coming motherhood.

Nora recovered herself, and took the poor creature's hands. Unused as she was to death, she could see there was nothing here to be done, but her attempts at comfort were of little avail.

"He said he would do it," the woman sobbed; "he said he would not go on any longer. He was crying all night, and he said he would not face another day. When my back was turned, I rising to get

some breakfast, he did it. Oh, my God, help me, help me!"

"Oh, what made him do this cruel thing?" Nora cried, drawing the woman close to her. She knew by the soft foreign accent that this was Mrs. Otto, of whom Mrs. Wilson had spoken to her.

"God forgive him. He did not mean it. I am sure he did not mean it. He struggled to get back when it was too late. He tried to come back to me—but you could not, dear, you could not." She went from Nora and flung herself by the bed. Nora tried to draw her away. She took her hands from the poor, dead face, and soothed her into some little attempt at calmness.

"Yes, he was ill," Mrs. Otto answered her, trying to collect her thoughts from the stupor that seemed about to engulf her. "He had so much work, and we could hardly live on the little he got for it. He had a dozen boots to finish before noon, and he would only get one-and-five for them. He said he was tired of it all, that he would sooner be dead; and oh God! look at him, he is dead, he is dead."

Nora drew her towards the door, trying to rouse her from the terrible outburst of grief she foresaw for her, and its dangers to her in her condition. She feared to leave her in the room alone with the corpse.

"Tell the Wilsons to send for a doctor," she urged. She watched the woman go down the stairs, and turned herself to the man who lay upon the bed. The light fell upon his thin face, lighting it so that it seemed to smile. She stood, knowing there was no help for him. In the room with its strange silence she gazed upon him in fear. This was what she might have been if she had had the courage or the cowardice to have done as he had. This strange, cold body upon the bed, that knew now all that was to be known of this world and the next, who, to escape the cruel dealings of mankind, had chosen to face alone the anger of God.

"After all, you might have waited," she said. "Life is so short. A few years, even of misery, what does it count now? The grief they would have brought you was not worth the sorrow you have left to others." She listened as if for an answer, so near

had she been to death herself that she felt this man a comrade. She could hear the loud, excited talking of the Wilsons, the banging of the hall door as someone rushed for a doctor, the loud weeping of the young wife, and, above all, the singing of Miss Marlow, who still held her party undisturbed. But in the room where she stood was the strange silence of death, the strange body of the dead, so like yet so unlike the living. Nora knelt beside the corpse, a prayer upon her lips. She trembled at being alone in such a scene of a life's despair, where a man's years had ended so suddenly, where his soul had found release, and gone forth, perhaps no further than the room where she was.

He had tried to return from that peace he had desired. What was it he had heard as he closed death's doors? Was it the wild cry from his poor wife that fled with him into the shadow, like a hand drawing his soul from its doom, or the dreams of a baby's lips that followed his desperate spirit down the black abyss? Was it no more than the struggle of the body to retain the one world

that it knew—its last fight, foreseeing nought but the sure corruption that was to be its end?

Did he foresee no peace, nor the rest he had planned, under the angry eyes of his Maker? Or was it less than this—the breath of some lost summer, the song of a thrush, that blew through death's doors with him, reminding him of a world lost? Nora trembled and prayed, pausing as if for an answer, but only heard the catching of her own breath and the loud ticking of the watch upon a chair beside the bed—a cheap affair, wound up by those stiffening fingers and set to count the hours its owner would keep no more on earth. The dead man seemed to look upon her in triumph. He lay with unclosed eyes, smiling in his mystery.

She rose to her feet as a rush of people came to the door, and stood aside for them to enter. In a moment the little room was full. A doctor was bending over the dead man, only to rise, shaking his head.

"No use—he is gone."

Mrs. Wilson plied Nora with questions which she could not answer.

"I can't tell you anything," she said. "I only heard a cry, and came up too late. Where is the poor wife?"

"I left her on my bed. She has fainted, poor dear. I must go back to her now: the doctor will be wanted there, not here, I am afraid."

Nora went down to her own little room, and sank into a chair. She was shivering and still half dazed with the shock; she could hear the tramp of feet above her and the murmur of voices. Suddenly from the next room came a frightful scream.

"My husband—oh, my husband, he is dead, he is dead!"

The startling cry struck Nora to the heart.

"My husband," she repeated. What if this had happened to Daniel? Here was something she had not thought of before, in all her hours of misery. Suppose death had come in her absence? There was no horror to compare to this; there was nothing that mattered but this. All her thoughts had been for herself, and, in the meantime, what of him? Was he ill? Was he dead?

Her husband. In a sudden terror she put on her hat and ran from the room. What if he hated her, told her to go, she did not care, only she must see him, know that he was well. It was impossible that he could be dead, lying stiff and unresponsive, and she upon the earth not knowing, not questioning, perhaps through her act forcing him to do some terrible crime, to cut short his allotted years, and lie like the poor youth upstairs, cold and dead!

Without a thought of self, she flew from the house, and in the grey light of early morning hastened on toward the little home Daniel had first brought her to. She covered the long way with wonderful speed and little weariness. Her heart had command of her feet. Half running, half walking, she reached the end of her journey in little over an hour. Only when she came to the street where she used to live did she falter at all, and for a moment stop to take her breath.

There her heart failed her, a terror took possession of it. What if the house were empty, if he had gone and she did not know

where to seek him? What if he were ill, and she had come too late to save him? What if he were dead, and she could not see him again?

She pulled herself together and moved towards the house. She could see no signs of life about it; it looked dirty and neglected. The blinds upstairs were drawn crooked, the curtains soiled, and the downstairs window stood open to the morning. She crept up to it to look through, her heart beating wildly, the tears falling down her cheeks.

She leaned across the sill and looked into the little room she knew so well. For a moment she could see nothing; then the darkness cleared, the old furniture seemed to rise from the corners to thrust itself to her gaze and remembrance. It was then the same. Daniel had not gone.

She looked more eagerly, and nearly cried aloud when she perceived the room was not unoccupied. A man sat in the armchair by the fireless grate; his feet were stretched out as if for warmth nearly into the ashes. By his side stood a lamp whose flameless wick was still glowing. The man's head

was turned from the window—Nora could not see his features.

She lifted herself across the sill and stepped into the room, but the man did not stir. She bent above him, looking into his face. She whispered, trembling, "Daniel, I have come home," but he did not hear.

She drew back afraid, so that the light would fall upon him more kindly. There was something in his attitude that terrified her. Why did he lie there, with the dead fire at his feet, the open window blowing the cold breeze upon him, the dying lamp beside him? He did not seem to breathe. The light fell upon the face she loved, and she saw the deep lines of care upon it: lines such as only one sees upon the face of those asleep or dead. When the living eyes are hidden, with the leaping fire of the present quenched within them, then how well one can read the face traced over with the lines of the past, the tired lids with their look of rest belied by the shadowy hollows under their lashes, the drooping mouth, the wasted cheeks—all the secrets of the heart revealed when the eyes are forbidden to lie.

Here Nora read all which her husband's reserved nature would have hidden: his struggles, his disappointments, his weariness, his despair. All the sorrows of a life are written on a sleeper's face.

He lay there without movement, and it came with a rush of terror upon her that she was too late, that he was dead.

An echo of a far cry came to her lips. "My husband, oh my husband, he is dead!"

In a storm of tears she flung herself upon his body, and felt herself enfolded in his arms.

"Nora, my darling, you have come back at last!"

She clung to him, crying and sobbing.

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